

# THE PENCOURT FILE

Barrie Penrose  
and  
Roger Courtiour



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On 16 March 1976 Sir Harold Wilson surprised the nation and large parts of the world by resigning as Prime Minister while clearly at the height of his powers. Why ?

On 12 May of that year, Sir Harold summoned two journalists whom he had not previously met, Barrie Penrose and Roger Courtiour, and suggested that they investigate interference with British democratic processes by South African and British intelligence agents. Why ?

Sir Harold also turned the authors towards a missing government file about one Norman Scott, a former friend of the Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe. Why ?

Also on 16 March 1976 an airline pilot, Andrew Gino Newton, was put on trial because he had shot and killed Norman Scott's Great Dane, Rinka. Why ?

These are just the beginnings of a story that ranges from Whitehall to Johannesburg, from Los Angeles to Washington, from MI5 to the CIA and South Africa's BOSS, from the Lords to the Commons, from Liberal to Labour to the Conservative Parties, to the Wilson-inspired investigation (launched and subsequently dropped by the BBC as too hot to handle), which touched some of the lowest and the highest echelons of British society.

**The Pencourt File** will reverberate throughout British political life and, with its tale of interference with the application of the law, corruption and compromise, manipulation of the Press, conspiracy, the hint of treason and an alleged attempt to murder, will fascinate anyone interested in the survival of good and democratic government anywhere in the world.





Photograph of authors by OBSERVER  
CAMERA PRESS LONDON (Tony Martin)



## THE CAST

Alice Bacon	David Holmes
Peter Bessell	Emlyn Hooson
George Bush	Hubert Humphrey
Lord Byers	Andrew Newton
Lord Carrington	David Owen
Barbara Castle	Norman Scott
Sir Charles Curran	David Steel
David Ennals	Lord Stow Hill (Sir Frank
Lady Falkender (Marcia	Soskice)
Williams)	George Thomas
Peter Hain	Jeremy Thorpe
Judith Hart	Sir Harold Wilson
Edward Heath	Gordon Winter

Several policemen, etc.



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FILE**



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Barrie Penrose  
and  
Roger Courtiour

SECKER & Warburg  
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To these, and many others, we owe a great deal. Each will at once recognise that without their help and information such a project and book would never have been completed.



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(between pp. 376 and 377)

Sir Harold Wilson  
Edward Heath, Jeremy Thorpe and Harold Wilson  
Senator Hubert Humphrey and Harold Wilson  
George Bush  
Sir Maurice Oldfield  
Frederick Cheeseman  
Gordon Winter  
Norman Scott  
Harold Wilson, Marcia Williams and Jeremy Thorpe  
Jeremy Thorpe, Caroline Allpass and David Holmes  
Jeremy and Marion Thorpe  
Peter Bessell and Jeremy Thorpe  
Cyril Smith, David Steel and Jeremy Thorpe  
Emlyn Hooson  
Lord Byers  
George Thomas  
James Callaghan  
Baroness Falkender  
Sir Frank Soskice  
Judith Hart  
Bryon McAllister cartoon in the *Guardian*  
Marc cartoon in *The Times*  
Terence Gibbs  
George Deakin  
John Le Mesurier  
Dave Miller  
Peter Bessell, Det Chief Supt Michael Challes and Det Supt  
David Greenough  
Peter Bessell, the two police officers, Courtiour and Penrose  
Andrew Gino Newton

# Chapter 1

On the morning of Tuesday 16 March 1976, the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, had an Extraordinary Audience of Queen Elizabeth II in Buckingham Palace. Formally he explained to Her Majesty that he no longer wished to remain Prime Minister. He intended to make way for a successor at 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's residence and office, and to seek comparative obscurity as a backbench Member of Parliament.

Later that morning he told the assembled members of the Cabinet of his decision and by the afternoon it had become the lead story on home and international wire services.

It was an event that stunned the British Labour Party and caused puzzlement throughout the country and in political circles all over the world. In the days leading up to 16 March, there had been no hint that Mr Wilson was about to go: no obvious leaks to the newspapers, no gossip in high political circles that his decision had been made. When the official announcement came, the surprise everywhere was apparently genuine and absolute.

Protesting almost too much to his Cabinet colleagues, who were reluctant to take him at face value, Mr Wilson told them: "I have not wavered in this decision and it is irrevocable." He maintained strongly that he had already decided during the February 1974 General Election that he would remain in office for no more than two years.

He offered four reasons for his resignation, all of which turned on his belief that he had been Prime Minister for long enough and that he should not block the ambitions of fresh talented colleagues. But these reasons were barely convincing. He was a man who openly admitted that he enjoyed the power of his office. There was also no doubt that he was a proven political survivor who rode and thrived on crises.

It was true that he had been in Parliament for thirty-one years, thirteen of them as Labour Party leader, eight of them as Prime Minister. But he still seemed altogether too young to retire. Only six days before the announcement he had happily celebrated his



60th birthday with his wife Mary and the family. By comparison, a former Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had been 63 before even reaching office. And Sir Winston Churchill was still in office at the age of 80. In the event, too, Mr Wilson's successor, James Callaghan, turned out to be older than himself and hardly a fresh face at the Palace of Westminster.

Ironically, too, when they heard the announcement, members of the London Stock Exchange and overseas investors, who had not been considered close allies of Mr Wilson in the past, showed apprehension about his imminent departure. There was criticism of his hasty abandonment of his office in mid-term, right in the middle of a national crisis: the equivalent of a ship's captain leaving a sinking vessel before his crew. Clearly Mr Wilson's decision could not be explained as the result of pressure from financial quarters.

Meanwhile the British public, finding that the experts could supply no real answer about what had come over their leader, turned to other matters in the news that week.

That third week in March turned out to be an uncomfortably busy week in other respects. The Irish Republican Army stepped up its crude assaults on the British mainland when a bomb exploded on the London Underground. There was also a bomb-shell in the news of a different kind, but which for millions of people was as shattering as any physical explosion. The marriage between Princess Margaret, the Queen's sister, and Lord Snowdon officially broke down. An embarrassed spokesman explained that a judicial separation had been arranged after sixteen years of marriage.

For ordinary people throughout the world, to whom the Royal Family represented stability and the best in British tradition, the separation was a bitter blow.

As an escape from all this gloom, many people in Britain turned to lighter events.

Newspapers responded to their needs with mildly amusing stories that seemed to caricature a whole way of life.

For instance, several newspapers wrote about a Gloucestershire coach driver called Mr Heaven who was sacked because of an alleged extra-marital relationship. His company complained that they had been obliged to cover up when Mr Heaven's wife telephoned asking where he was. When the coach company maintained to an Industrial Tribunal that Mr Heaven's driving was

adversely affected by his extra-marital affair, a foreign reader might well have smiled at these manifestations of British morality. While unmentioned things were going on in political and Royal circles, it seemed unreasonable that an ordinary working man should be threatened with the loss of his livelihood because of his private affairs.

Indeed reading the papers casually that day the same reader might well have thought British attitudes as a whole rather confused and out of touch with the modern world. For, on the same day that Mr Heaven's case was being discussed, a judge in Exeter sent another 29-year-old man to prison for two years after he had shot a dog belonging to an unemployed male model.

Looking at things from afar, no one would have guessed that this tiny incident of the shot dog was the key to why an established Prime Minister resigned when he did. That it was linked with Lord Snowdon's departure. That it would lead to the uncovering of one of the most cancerous political scandals of our time. That the affair had actually involved three of the world's most powerful Secret Services. And that it had undermined democracy and altered the course of British politics over most of the last two decades.

## Chapter 2

On 12 May, only two months after that eventful week, a solitary wood pigeon fluttered out of the late spring sunlight and landed in a corner of a quiet suburban English garden. Barrie Penrose reached for his Spanish 410 shotgun and wondered if he could take a potshot at the bird without upsetting his neighbours.

Then the telephone broke the silence. The startled pigeon flapped its wings noisily and lifted itself quickly out of danger.

Penrose thought it might be the BBC newsroom with an assignment, although it was his day off. But a voice he did not recognise was on the line.

"Barrie Penrose?"

"Yes."

"Sir Harold Wilson's office here."

"Oh yes?" He hardly bothered to hide his surprise.

"Sir Harold wondered if you might like to join him for drinks this evening?"

"Sir Harold Wilson?"

"That's right," interrupted the voice. "Can we say at six o'clock then? At 5 Lord North Street, just around the corner from the House of Commons."

Penrose was baffled by the call. A hoax perhaps by a colleague at the studio with a talent for mimicry? Or a simple mistake by one of the former Prime Minister's political aides?

For more than seven years as a television reporter he had interviewed numerous politicians on a variety of subjects. Before working regularly for the BBC, he had often spoken with politicians, mostly ordinary MPs, while writing for the London Sunday newspaper the *Observer*. But he had never interviewed Harold Wilson.

Penrose recalled voting Labour at the February 1974 Election. But that was no reason for an invitation to Sir Harold's home. Picking up the telephone again he dialled 219 3000, the House of Commons central number. He was given extension 5604.

"Harold Wilson's office," answered the voice that had called

him a few minutes before. Yes, the meeting was arranged for that evening. Penrose felt foolish for checking but at least he had discovered the earlier call was no hoax.

But why should Britain's longest serving Prime Minister of this century, just two months after mysteriously resigning, call an ordinary news reporter at home? Penrose had only had contact with Harold Wilson once, in the street. At the October 1974 General Election, when Labour defeated the Conservatives for the second time that year, Penrose had been assigned by a BBC news editor to wait outside the Prime Minister's house until he appeared. The newsroom wanted Mr Wilson's first reactions on winning the election.

Predictably scores of other newsmen had been given the same task. Penrose looked back on the door-stepping incident with fond amusement. When the Prime Minister walked out of his house into a packed Lord North Street, flanked by political aides and Special Branch policemen, he was besieged by waiting reporters and photographers. Mr Wilson forged his way through the mêlée in the direction of Transport House, the Labour Party headquarters, 150 yards away. Urged on by his BBC cameraman Bob Poole and his sound recordist, Penrose had pushed his way towards the Prime Minister. As pressmen swirled around the stocky figure, his pipe clenched tightly between his teeth, Penrose suddenly found himself face to face with Mr Wilson.

He asked him for his first reactions at Labour's narrow victory.

"I have nothing to say to the Press for the moment," he replied gruffly, pulling the pipe out of his mouth.

Penrose repeated the question in a louder voice, pressing the microphone nearer to Mr Wilson's face. There was grim annoyance in his expression now. He paused for a moment and turned towards the BBC reporter, glowering.

"I don't know who you are, but don't you speak English?" Within seconds the Prime Minister disappeared into a crowd of tumbling reporters still anxiously chasing him up the road. The scene was a fiasco. Bob Poole put a hand on Penrose's shoulder and said calmly: "We tried; let him go."

So why did the same politician, who enjoyed an uneasy relationship with the Press, and who often expressed openly his dislike for the BBC, want to meet him now?

Earlier that morning Penrose had talked to another journalist who worked for the BBC and who had shared an assignment with



him in Barcelona a week before: Roger Courtiour. Courtiour and Penrose had been at the same school together and in the past had worked on the same stories. He decided to call Courtiour again and cautiously ask his advice. Although they had worked together in Spain recently, this had been the first time they had collaborated in eighteen months. Generally the two men worked separately for rival BBC programmes.

"Can we talk, Roger?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"If I tell you something odd I want to make it clear I'm not necessarily sharing a story. If there is a story this evening the Nine O'Clock News have first bite."

"Fair enough."

"You're probably going to find this strange, but I've just been invited to see Wilson at his house tonight."

"Harold Wilson?"

"Yes."

"A call to the newsroom?" Courtiour asked incredulously.

"No, at home."

"How extraordinary!" He blew loudly into the receiver. Then he added sharply: "Want me to come along?"

Penrose ignored the self-invitation.

"I just wanted to see your reaction. What could he want?"

"Harold Wilson is known for his dislike of the BBC and he's also a wily politician. And he's just resigned in rather mysterious circumstances."

Penrose mentioned that he had already put a crew on stand-by in case the former Premier wanted to do an interview for the news that evening.

"Why doesn't he go through the normal channels if he wants to say something?"

"I've no idea. If you want to come along be at Lord North Street just before six."

As the chimes of Big Ben struck six o'clock Penrose and Courtiour arrived at 5 Lord North Street. Both reporters felt apprehensive about the meeting, yet were intrigued to know the reason for the unusual invitation.

A young uniformed policeman stood to the right of the tiny Georgian portico, his hand resting casually on the ornate railings. Fixed to them was an alarm box with several buttons. Penrose pressed the white door bell and stood back. The policeman said

nothing, not even to ask for an identification card or enquire whether they had an appointment.

"Is that all you've got for protection?" Courtiour asked, glancing at the simple alarm system.

"Well there's nothing here," replied the policeman, smiling and squeezing under his left arm. "I'm a sitting duck." He explained quietly that the alarm bell had to be pressed in the event of a terrorist attack and this sounded in a nearby police station.

Courtior reflected on how casual the British were about security, including the safety of their elder statesmen. The Irish war had spilled over to the British mainland – there had been a series of bomb attacks – and yet even prime targets appeared almost unprotected.

Almost at once the door swung open and the well-known figure was standing there smiling.

"Do come in." He beckoned with his hand, glancing sideways along the fashionable Westminster street.

Penrose introduced his colleague to Sir Harold. He showed no surprise that two journalists had arrived, not one, as his aide had arranged that morning. They stood for a moment in the ground-floor room which was cluttered with packing-cases and thick files. A long wooden table stood in the middle of the room and lying haphazardly on it were red despatch boxes with the Royal crest on them.

In one corner was an impressive gathering of signed photographs sent to Sir Harold by heads of state from around the world. They were jumbled together on top of a tall bureau like pictures of worthy relatives: in front the Emperor and Empress of Japan posed beside a portrait of President Nixon and one of the young King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden. Tucked behind them in no particular order were other monarchs and world leaders.

"Do come upstairs, we must talk," Sir Harold said in his familiar Yorkshire accent. He hurried towards the staircase and began running upstairs, at first taking two steps at a time.

Courtior and Penrose followed along more slowly; both carried briefcases. Outside the weather was warm and sticky but they were wearing the formal suits they thought appropriate for the occasion. In contrast Sir Harold was without a jacket, his shirt sleeves kept high by armbands. Clearly he gave no sign of wanting the two reporters to stand on any ceremony with him.

His first-floor drawing-room was tastefully furnished and warm.

Cosy bourgeois comfort, Penrose thought, making a mental note of everything around him. He sat down at one end of a deep four-seater settee facing the mantelpiece. On the wall to the left was a colour photograph of Mr Wilson and President Kennedy together in the United States: in the centre of the mantelpiece a Victorian skeleton clock with a noisy tick.

Courtiour sat facing the window overlooking Lord North Street. There were two Staffordshire figures of William Gladstone and his wife standing to one side. On his left much of the wall was covered from ceiling to floor with books, not all of them political.

Sir Harold stood at one end of the room pouring drinks at a trolley. He poured out two whiskies and a sherry. For a few moments he busied himself with handing them out. He sat down next to the window and lit a cigar. Penrose had never seen him smoke anything other than a pipe. It was a glimpse of something different from his public image.

"Did you read my speech to the Parliamentary Press Gallery today?" he asked pointedly.

The journalists had not; and they were reluctant to admit it. Indeed not only had they not read it but they had not heard about the speech and were not members of the Press Gallery. Sir Harold explained how he had made the speech to journalists earlier in the afternoon. He pulled his typewritten notes out of his pocket and passed them to Penrose to read.

"I said frankly that democracy as we know it is in grave danger," he said, holding his cigar between two outstretched fingers. Courtiour thought such a Churchillian mannerism singularly apt.

"Anti-democratic agencies in South Africa and elsewhere put all our democratic futures at risk."

Both journalists winced openly at his pronouncement. Neither said a word. They were still in some awe, sitting comfortably at home with the man who had governed the country for so many years.

"I think you as journalists should investigate the forces that are threatening democratic countries like Britain," he went on. He paused, lighting his cigar again. "I think you will find an investigation rewarding. I will help you although for the time being I cannot speak too openly."

Sir Harold plunged on into what became a kind of teach-in for the two reporters. The discussion began with the allegations he had made at Westminster about South African interference. But he

spoke, too, about his distrust of a section of the British Secret Service.

"I am not certain that for the last eight months when I was Prime Minister I knew what was happening, fully, in Security," he said with obvious annoyance. He really could not rule out the possibility that individuals working inside MI5, and even MI6, had contributed to the "smears" which, he complained, had frequently appeared in the Press and elsewhere while he had been at Number 10. He told the reporters that some people in the Security Services were "very right-wing". "They would naturally be brought up to believe," he said, "that Socialist leaders were another form of Communist. They are blinkered; the sort of people who would have spread the stories of Number 10 and the Communist cell."

"A Communist cell?" asked Penrose. "I don't understand."

"They were saying I was tied up with the Communists," Sir Harold explained, "and that MI5 knew. The arch link was my Political Secretary Marcia [Lady Falkender]. She was supposed to be a dedicated Communist!"

Sir Harold went on to say that the story about the "Communist cell" had been repeatedly told in all seriousness and eventually it had reached his ears at Downing Street in mid-1975. The Secret Service was supposed to have "evidence" that the Prime Minister and Marcia Williams, along with other Labour Ministers, had formed the "Communist cell" right in the middle of Number 10.

Sir Harold emphasised that his basic concern was the fact that British Intelligence had been quoted by reliable witnesses as being the actual source for such unfounded rumours. He said that people had come to hear this particular story in narrow, fashionable circles, invariably in the context that "MI5 knew", and that he had concluded it was part of a wider well-orchestrated campaign against him and his Labour Government.

Without disguising a certain bitterness the former Prime Minister described the steps he had taken to combat such alleged malpractices inside the Secret Service. He had first called in Sir Maurice Oldfield, the head of MI6. Normally, he said, a British Prime Minister does not meet the head of MI6, the service responsible for intelligence and espionage activities outside the United Kingdom. Sir Maurice would usually make his reports to the Prime Minister through the Foreign Office. Only the head of MI5, the body responsible for domestic security, had direct access to Number 10.



Both reporters realised that for the Prime Minister to summon the MI6 chief must be almost without precedent.

"Maurice Oldfield?" Penrose enquired.

"Oldfield," Sir Harold replied, "said that there's a section of MI5 which is unreliable. And there was also a man who had once held high office in the Security Service." He mentioned the name. "And Oldfield confirmed this and he said he was going to bring it out."

"And?" said Courtiour.

"I never heard any more. That was the day I went on holiday in August 1975."

Penrose could not believe that in view of the Prime Minister's concern Sir Maurice Oldfield had not reported back later with his findings.

"Did he take the matter seriously?" asked the reporter, as if such a question was superfluous.

"He said there is this group . . ." replied Sir Harold lowering his voice. A distinct note of bitterness had crept into the conversation.

For a moment the reporters wondered if Sir Harold had not said too much already. Yet he was talking very openly to them.

The seriousness with which Sir Harold spoke of his misgivings introduced an anxious chill into the conversation. He was clearly speaking about important matters of state. Distrust by any British Prime Minister of his Secret Service, or even a section of it, was undoubtedly a remarkable story by any standards. The reporters asked if he had taken any other action once he had talked with Sir Maurice Oldfield.

Sir Harold explained that by the summer of 1975 the smear campaign against his government was in full swing. Word, he said, was also put about that his Political Secretary had not been positively vetted. She was said to be a security risk. Positive vetting, the reporters had learned, was a rigorous form of security clearance for top civil servants which had to be repeated every five years. Sir Harold was certain he said that the MI5 faction was also responsible for spreading the rumour that Marcia Williams had not been positively vetted. "In fact, she had," said Sir Harold.

Disturbed by the persistent reports which had been reaching him Sir Harold said he had also called in the head of MI5, Sir Michael Hanley. The career Secret Service chief had apparently also confirmed the existence within his Service of a disaffected faction with extreme right-wing views. Such an admission had perturbed

the Prime Minister. He went on holiday that summer troubled by what he had learned from his Secret Service chiefs. If he could not trust a section of MI5, how could he ask them to investigate impartially the rumours which were being made about himself and his entourage at Number 10? More particularly, how could he now investigate people whom he suspected might have infiltrated the Cabinet Office for sinister motives.

At one point Sir Harold said he was also worried by reports reaching him that the CIA might be involved in efforts to infiltrate the Cabinet Office. Rather than communicate through MI6 (which would have been the conventional method of approach) Sir Harold decided to go directly to the CIA.

On 10 February 1976 the Prime Minister sent a message to an old friend, his publisher Sir George Weidenfeld (who later received a peerage in Wilson's resignation honours), asking him if he could come round to the House of Commons. Weidenfeld arrived at Wilson's office shortly before lunch. Once they were alone, the Prime Minister asked him if he would take a confidential letter to a mutual friend, Senator Hubert Humphrey, whose memoirs Weidenfeld was publishing and whom he would be visiting in Washington in a few days' time. The letter contained the names of two men whose activities seemed particularly suspicious to Harold Wilson. It asked the former American Vice-President if he would ask the CIA, in their new post-Watergate frankness, to confirm whether or not the men had ever worked for them.

Whatever the CIA's record might have been in the past, and he, of course, had Watergate in mind at the time, he did not believe the Agency would risk misleading an ex-Vice-President. He stressed once more that until his illness Hubert Humphrey could still have become the next President of the United States.

Such unique revelations about the inner secrets of his own Cabinet Office naturally astounded Courtiour and Penrose. They would not have been so surprised if Wilson had suspected the Russian KGB had attempted to infiltrate spies into Downing Street. He had always urged, he said, the strictest vigilance to counter the espionage activities of the Communist bloc countries. Over the Kim Philby conspiracy in 1963 which trailed back to the Foreign Office defectors Burgess and Maclean, he had been critical of the Macmillan Government of the time and their handling of security problems.

However, in approaching the CIA through Hubert Humphrey

he was by implication raising the possibility that the Americans had somehow smuggled agents into his immediate entourage.

Sir Harold went on to say that the two names he had given Weidenfeld were those of an English businessman and the name of a doctor he thought might be bogus. The businessman had come to Sir Harold's attention when he had aroused suspicion at Labour Party conferences and elsewhere. Eventually people in his entourage believed the businessman could well be working for the CIA. At the height of the Nixon era he said this was not an altogether remote possibility.

The second man, Sir Harold went on, described himself as a doctor. But he had learned that the "doctor" was not listed in the British medical directory. The man had also claimed that he had helped with medical supplies on the Golan Heights in Israel during the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Sir Harold had eventually asked the Israeli Ambassador in London to check if the "doctor" really had been there as he claimed. The message came back from the Ambassador that there was no record of any such man and with the emphasis that the Israeli authorities kept extremely full records of people who were involved at the front.

Sir Harold had watched the man closely. He knew that the "doctor" called irregularly at his Political Office in Westminster. It was difficult to get rid of him too obviously because he was friendly with members of his staff. In any case perhaps the man was not working for the CIA. Perhaps he was only a harmless charlatan. Nonetheless Sir Harold said that his suspicion was such that he had noted down the number of the man's Swiss registration plates and had passed the information to British Security, but he had not been altogether satisfied with their answers.

"In the end British Security said he was wanted in America for airline ticket forgeries and thefts," he explained. "But they, for whatever reason, said 'that's all'."

Sir Harold had already been told by the Secret Service that the bogus doctor was not known to either American Intelligence or their Security Services. But the Labour Prime Minister had wanted to make absolutely certain that he did not have spies in his midst. It was in order to satisfy his curiosity, and to allay his growing suspicions that he had then asked his London publisher to carry out the extraordinary private mission, a task designed to by-pass the British Secret Service he did not wholly trust.

George Weidenfeld had duly delivered Harold Wilson's con-

fidential message. Senator Humphrey, Sir Harold said, contacted the Central Intelligence Agency at Langley in Virginia, and checks were put on the two men he had named.

"Anyway, George [Weidenfeld] went right to the top in CIA," Sir Harold went on. "And I got in writing that the businessman was not CIA but was known to act as though, well, to pretend he was. They knew all about him!"

"So the man was a phoney in fact?" asked Penrose.

"Yes," said Sir Harold. "Or he was working with some other intelligence agency. We don't know, do we? He was not working for British Intelligence I was told."

The sequel to George Weidenfeld's confidential mission to Washington was that George Bush, then the newly appointed CIA chief, had specially visited the British Prime Minister in London. On 18 March 1976, Mr Bush had called on him at Number 10 and had promised any CIA help that he might need in the future. The two men had also spoken about South Africa and the series of robberies Sir Harold and his staff had suffered.

After talking about these secret contacts with the CIA, Sir Harold spoke in detail about the burglaries that he and some of his Labour colleagues in the Government had suffered. He spoke too about the extraordinary "dirty tricks" which he said had been aimed against some of his Ministers in order to discredit them. He said the culprits were connected with South Africa and with intelligence circles in Britain itself. There was an important story to be investigated, he said, and more than once he used the name Watergate to describe what had been happening in Britain. He warned the two reporters to be on their guard, but he did not elaborate for the moment on what he meant.

He merely outlined the sort of co-operation with Penrose and Courtiour that he had in mind. He could help them with leads and they could exchange information. There would be regular confidential meetings: they would have open access to him.

"I see myself as the big fat spider in the corner of the room. Sometimes I speak when I'm asleep. You should both listen. Occasionally when we meet I might tell you to go to the Charing Cross Road and kick a blind man standing on the corner. That blind man may tell you something, lead you somewhere."

The former Prime Minister turned the conversation to how various attempts had been made to subvert the Labour Government. He said that South Africa had been behind the campaign

to smear the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe. By attacking the Liberal Party the South Africans also hoped to undermine the Labour administration in power. An outspoken critic against apartheid, Mr Thorpe had recently found himself at the centre of an extraordinary political storm. An unemployed male model named Norman Scott had alleged in court that he was being hounded "because of my sexual relationship with Jeremy Thorpe". At the time the relationship was said to have begun, homosexuality in Britain was a serious criminal offence for which men could still be imprisoned. Moreover, Scott had also claimed that he was a minor when he had first met Mr Thorpe. And he said openly that attempts had been made to kill and silence him.

Throughout the Press furore which followed Scott's outburst in court the Liberal leader had consistently denied such allegations, saying they were wild and untrue. At the height of the affair the Prime Minister had come out in open support of his Parliamentary colleague. Sir Harold had angrily raised his voice in the House of Commons on 9 March 1976 and blamed South Africa. Now in the privacy of his drawing-room he said he wanted the full extent of that sinister role exposed. Others occupying high office in Whitehall had also been involved in the affair he said. The reporters took his reference to be another attack on a "dissident" faction in the Secret Service.

Sir Harold paused, taking a pipe out of a jacket which was hanging over a chair. He began talking about a Government file which had gone missing. He believed the file was an important clue to the real facts behind the Thorpe case and the wider right-wing conspiracy. When he had been Prime Minister he had discovered that at least one of Norman Scott's files at the Department of Health and Social Security had gone missing. He suggested the reporters should attempt to find it; it could well prove to be important. Courtiour wondered for a moment why a British Prime Minister had concerned himself with a missing Social Security file.

"Chelsea," Sir Harold said suddenly. "A DHSS office somewhere in Chelsea. You'll find it.

"Let me show you something downstairs," he said. "I have had it specially installed."

He went quickly down the stairs and walked to a pine door in the front corner of the room by the window.

"Looks like a man's wardrobe or an ordinary cupboard, doesn't it?" he asked.

Sir Harold seized the handle and threw open the door.

"There should be no security problems now that I've had this monster put in." He stood there inviting them to admire the seven-foot-tall Chubb safe. It was one of the latest models, he explained, and extremely expensive. But very necessary, he emphasised. They should have no fear about the safety of any documents they passed to him.

"Make certain your own security is as good," he said gravely, looking once more at the safe. Noticing the somewhat surprised expression on their faces he added: "When you've had as many robberies as we have, you'll begin to understand." He seemed totally genuine in his fear about future break-ins, even though he was no longer Prime Minister.

Sir Harold slowly closed the door on his safe, glistening with its levers and coloured knobs. The meeting was obviously at an end.

Sir Harold urged them to meet him again. The two reporters said they would and added that they would immediately contact the BBC's Director-General. And they would also start work at once upon the investigation.

"Check out that missing file and see what you find," he suggested, opening the front door. "Keep me informed." They agreed enthusiastically and said goodbye, walking out bemusedly into the quiet Westminster street.

## Chapter 3

Stepping out in the direction of the Houses of Parliament, the two reporters talked excitedly about the meeting they had just had with Harold Wilson. What he had said to them opened up astonishing prospects. "We've already heard enough to fill the front page of any newspaper for a week," said Penrose. "Wherever the story leads I'm terrified of letting it slip straight through my fingers."

"Just imagine the other material there could be if we play our cards right," replied Courtiour. "What a source," he said loudly. "The spider in the corner!"

Very uncharacteristically he allowed himself a little dance on the pavement. Penrose had not seen him quite so uninhibited and enthusiastic about a story before. Then he became serious again. What could Sir Harold's motives possibly be, they both wondered. With his knowledge and connections, his status within the Labour Party and the Socialist International, to say nothing of his world standing, his approach to two ordinary journalists seemed recklessly unorthodox. Could they in fact produce what he expected of them? He seemed to be asking for their help, yet were they actually about to be used and manipulated for political purposes? Could they manage to follow up his leads and encourage his further confidences, yet remain sufficiently independent to draw their own conclusions from the material which they assembled? The trouble with a spider in the corner was that they could so easily become entangled in its web.

Exactly why a former Prime Minister should discuss highly sensitive matters of state with complete strangers was a mystery to the two reporters. Sir Harold risked censure from political opponents and allies alike if such disclosures became known. The reporters could well imagine the horrified reactions of the new Labour Prime Minister, Mr Callaghan, and the Conservative Opposition leader Mrs Thatcher, to say nothing of Secret Service chiefs in Whitehall. Members of Parliament might well ask why the former Prime Minister did not make such serious allegations in the House of Commons instead of to two ordinary journalists.

For the time being, however, the reporters were not primarily concerned with why Sir Harold had chosen to talk with them so candidly. If a right-wing section of the Secret Service had conspired against the Prime Minister, and had been using public money to undermine the Labour Government, Sir Harold might well feel justified in choosing unorthodox methods to expose the fact. In any event he had, of course, said that while Penrose and Courtiour examined the leads he secretly provided, he would work within Parliament for a Royal Commission of Enquiry.

To the reporters, however, the idea that a section of the Secret Service could be plotting against an elected government of the day seemed incredible. Yet Harold Wilson had said it unequivocally in his first conversation with them. He was concerned, he said, with the lack of accountability of MI5. In itself this sounded odd because, of course, the Prime Minister of the day was also technically the head of the Secret Service. It was true that Britain had probably the most hidden Secret Service in the world and Parliament did not traditionally debate its past or future role. The reporters pondered on just what had gone wrong between the Wilson Government and the twilight world of the British Secret Service.

Just how concerned Sir Harold had been at the conduct of the security services and foreign and right-wing interference during his time as Prime Minister could be judged from some of his other fears. He had astonished the reporters by suggesting he might be under electronic surveillance. His telephone he said could not be trusted. The reporters should not phone him at Lord North Street: moreover, they should not give him any documents from which the watermarks could be traced back to them. Such cloak-and-dagger precautions had seemed more suited to Eastern Europe than a democratic society like Britain.

Yet for the reporters it was sufficient that a former Prime Minister, only eight weeks out of power, should be making such perplexing allegations.

For several minutes both men fell silent, contemplating the possibilities and the pitfalls. Penrose could not get over the suddenness with which this had all come about. From his point of view Sir Harold's approach and his promise of intriguing revelations had come virtually out of the blue.

For Courtiour, now that he began to put the meeting in perspective, there was rather more logic to the way that the

ex-Prime Minister had chosen to approach his colleague. The two reporters had worked together on the recent Barcelona story which involved South African interference in British political affairs, the subject about which Sir Harold was most concerned. But prior to that, Courtiour – working separately from Penrose – had put literally months of investigation into other stories that touched on South African interference. By a combination of chance and a great deal of painstaking research, it could well be that he had accumulated as much first-hand knowledge of this area as any other investigative journalist in London.

As he turned over in his mind the former Premier's fears and allegations Courtiour felt quietly confident that they had a sound basis for the further investigation they were to carry out. As far back as 1971 he had worked on a BBC documentary film which had exposed a South African spy network; he still had all the documents from that time in his files at home. The film had shown evidence that South African agents carried out surveillance of Black Nationalists in Britain, not only following them about but also breaking into offices and stealing documents. Material obtained by these agents in Britain had subsequently been used during trials in South Africa of prominent opponents of Apartheid. One agent of the South Africans admitted then that Labour MPs who opposed Apartheid had been watched and acted against by the South Africans.

Courtior recalled that although there had been an uproar in Parliament and the Press at the time, the man at the centre of the allegations had emerged unscathed. It had puzzled him why this should be and he welcomed the opportunity to see what had happened to the man in the meantime.

A year later Courtiour had done extensive background work on right-wing groups not only in the UK but across the Continent of Europe. He had amassed a great deal of literature but had found it difficult to pin down the shadowy groups.

Were they a threat to democracy or merely a lunatic fringe, inevitable in any democratic society? Sir Harold had suggested that there were links between the two areas; the right-wing groups and South African agents.

More recently in December of 1975, Courtiour had started working on a documentary film about Peter Hain, the radical Chairman of the Young Liberals. Hain had come to Britain from South Africa in 1966, and soon made a name for himself as an

active and sometimes embarrassingly outspoken young politician. In 1970 his leadership of the "Stop the 70 Tour Committee" had aroused widespread controversy. This was a campaign to disrupt sports events wherever South African teams played in Britain as a protest at the Apartheid policies of the South African Government. It made him many enemies. Hain was brought to court on charges including incitement which were instigated by a group of private citizens who objected to his radical activities, but he was acquitted on all but one of the charges: he was fined £200 for conspiring to interrupt the Davis Cup tennis match with South Africa.

Now for the second time the Young Liberal leader was to appear at the Old Bailey on a charge which could wreck his career. He had been accused of stealing £490 from a branch of Barclays Bank in Putney on Friday 24 October 1975, and was to be tried in April 1976 amid a blaze of publicity. This time the charge against Hain was based on identification evidence given by the cashier from whom the money had been snatched and three young boys who had seen the bank robber as he fled down Putney High Street.

For five months Hain's career remained in a state of limbo while he waited for his trial to take place. Even if he were to be found innocent, his life would have been disrupted and suspicions about his character would linger. The manner of his arrest when no fewer than ten police officers descended on his home seemed to reflect how ready some members of the public were to believe the worst.

During the pre-trial period, Courtiour spent countless hours talking with Hain, with his wife Pat and with his parents.

He interviewed people who were to appear both for the prosecution and for the defence and, with his passion for amassing documents, news clippings and notes of every person he met, he soon had an extensive library of material about the case and the problems of identification that it highlighted. The Young Liberal leader would probably be found innocent or guilty on the identification evidence alone. There was no other evidence which pointed to Hain's being a snatch thief.

From the material that Courtiour was amassing, which included statements from many of the witnesses at the forthcoming trial, it became clear that the verdict hung very much in the balance. Although there were some crucial discrepancies, the bank robber must have looked remarkably like Hain, so the jury might decide either way.



For Hain there was perhaps one consolation that came out of the BBC team's work. They arranged for him to take a lie-detector test; in an American court its findings would have been admissible as evidence. According to the test, Hain was proved not guilty.

Hain knew, however, that he would not be permitted to use the outcome of the lie-detector test in a British court. It was just another item for Courtiour to file away and use in his BBC programme.

As it turned out, the jury did decide that Hain was not guilty of being a bank robber, but only after a long and tense hearing and only on a majority decision.

Had it been admissible evidence, the lie-detector test might well have enabled the jury to reach their decision much quicker. So too would a couple of other points which had emerged in the final stages of Courtiour's investigation. The first of these was the information from Scotland Yard that in an earlier bank robbery in Fulham Broadway a cashier had also described the young bank robber as resembling Peter Hain. And the second point was that a man had come forward with information that this "double" of Hain's who was responsible for the bank robbery had been put there specially by the South Africans.

Kenneth Wyatt, the man who approached Hain, was a large, shambling sort of figure who had two sides to his character. He had served as a Conservative Councillor in local government and had acted as a school governor in Watford. But he had also been sentenced to two years' imprisonment for selling obscene films and magazines. After leaving prison he had become involved in recruiting girls to act as couriers for an organisation that was being set up by a Lebanese "operator" called Fouad Kamil in Barcelona. From Wyatt's description, Kamil seemed to be a kind of latter-day pirate engaged in a private struggle to obtain a large sum of money from the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa: he claimed that he had previously been commissioned by Anglo American to recover stolen diamonds on their behalf – a task that he had carried out very successfully, if unconventionally – and that the Corporation owed him a million pounds in unpaid commission.

The point that was relevant to Hain was that Kamil and his friends in Barcelona had shown Wyatt evidence that the South Africans had arranged for a double of Peter Hain to commit a bank robbery and then to return to South Africa.

Wyatt said that Kamil had shown him photocopies of photo-

graphs of the "double" taken recently in South Africa. He also said that not only was there this plot against Peter Hain but the entire Liberal Party was to be attacked and smeared. A pornographic film in which the daughter of a Liberal MP had taken part would be released in order to damage the MP.

Wyatt claimed he had been shown files which had been stolen from the Johannesburg offices of Anglo American. The files suggested that the motive for the attack on the Liberals was to ensure the return of a Conservative government – which would be sympathetic to South Africa – at the next election. If Liberal voters could be disillusioned, then the theory was that they would return to the Conservative fold.

Hain was naturally interested in any evidence that might be useful at his trial. Wyatt had in fact produced as "evidence" for what he was saying, only a newspaper clipping, and an article printed on what appeared to be a page from a small-circulation magazine. Under the heading "Vorster's Empire" the article outlined what it claimed to be the real reason for the swift political changes taking place in Southern Africa. The changes, it said, were determined by a plan to set up a super-government for the whole of the southern portion of the continent under the control of various multi-national companies.

Both Hain and Courtiour repeatedly asked Wyatt why he had been asked to tell this story and why he had no better evidence. He was apologetic: he was only a messenger, he did not understand all the political talk. But he let Courtiour tape-record his story which did not change on what was now its third telling.

To Hain and Courtiour this odd man with his strange story was only half-way to being convincing. They would have to wait until his next trip to Barcelona to see if he could really bring back the kind of proof that could be used at Hain's trial. Unfortunately, Wyatt was suddenly arrested and became headline news overnight. Under the headline "£1m TERROR PLOT CHARGE" the *Daily Express* of 18 February reported that Scotland Yard and "a firm of international private detectives" had uncovered a plot involving Wyatt which was directed against the world's biggest gold corporation, Anglo American.

Courtior contacted Wyatt again when he was unexpectedly given bail on 27 February, and Wyatt admitted at once that he had been involved in the conspiracy. Together with others, he had sent threats to Anglo American personnel. But the threats had not

been serious – they were only intended to drive the company into negotiating with Kamil.

It was at this point, on 29 January 1976, that the leader of the Liberal Party, Jeremy Thorpe, began to be subjected to what many people felt to be a smear campaign based on allegations that were made in a Devon court by an unemployed male model called Norman Scott. Hain had differed with Thorpe frequently on political matters over the years, but at a meeting of Young Liberals in West London he spoke from the floor, just two days after the model's allegations had been made public: "May I express," he said, "the feelings of everybody in this room when I say we are with you in resisting the politics of smear, insinuation and gossip that have dogged you over the last few days."

Hain's speech was greeted with huge cheers and clapping from the young audience.

"Thank you, Peter," replied Mr Thorpe. "Without in any way involving myself in matters that are *sub judice*, may I say the same goes for you." In his panelled room at Westminster Mr Thorpe told Hain not to worry unduly on his behalf.

"I have the three most powerful pillars of the state on my side," he said, "Harold Wilson, Lord Goodman and MI5."

Mr Thorpe was to make this claim to another colleague, and what he meant apparently was that Harold Wilson controlled Parliament; Lord Goodman had strong links with the Press; and MI5, the domestic side of British Intelligence, could cope with any undercover attempt to smear him. Hain questioned whether Mr Thorpe really trusted the "blokes in MI5" and had been disarmed by Thorpe's reply that the overall head of MI5 was in fact Harold Wilson.

At the same time, Mr Thorpe had asked Peter Hain to "keep him abreast of any other developments", so Hain decided to tell him about Kenneth Wyatt. Mr Thorpe was delighted and clearly felt he should hear more of Wyatt's "South African smear" story. He at once asked Hain to let him have an *aide-mémoire* about it.

In Hain's memo, which was marked "Private and Confidential", the leader of the Young Liberals pointed out that it now seemed "more possible that the plot to discredit the Liberal Party might be true". As well as giving details of Wyatt and his group he mentioned the role of a journalist with South African connections called Gordon Winter.

Sitting in Mr Thorpe's office at the House of Commons while he

read through the memo, Hain had wondered what the Liberal leader would make of it. In fact, his reaction was direct and slightly surprising. "The Prime Minister will want to see this," he told Hain, picking up the phone immediately and asking to be put through to 10 Downing Street.

Courtior, for his part, felt that the interest in the story now being shown by Mr Thorpe made it imperative to put an interview with Wyatt on film as soon as possible. Although personally he still remained sceptical, some highly placed political figures now seemed rather eager to believe in what Wyatt had to say. So three rolls of film were shot for the BBC with reporter David Taylor interviewing Wyatt at his home. The film could be used after Wyatt's trial was over and would be an invaluable exclusive if he were convicted and sent to prison.

The following day, 9 March, during question time in the House of Commons the Labour MP James Wellbeloved asked the Prime Minister "whether at his next meeting with Dr Waldheim, the United Nations Secretary General, he would raise with him the activities of South African agents in the internal affairs of democratic countries including Britain." He went on: "Can you say if you have received any evidence of the involvement of South African agents in the framing of leading Liberal Party members?"

Mr Wilson replied: "I have no doubt at all, there is strong South African participation in recent activities relating to the leader of the Liberal Party." There had been, he said, "very strong and heavily financed private master-minding of certain political operations". Mr Wilson added that the "South African participation" to which he referred was "based on massive resources of business money and private agents of various kinds and various qualities". However, he concluded, "I have seen no evidence at all that the South African Government or its agencies have any connection with these unsavoury activities."

The House was stunned and confused by the Prime Minister's outburst. John Pardoe, a Liberal MP who had been sitting next to Jeremy Thorpe, asked the Prime Minister:

"In view of the very serious nature of the suggestion that South African Security Forces, without the apparent recognition of the South African Government, are involved in the affairs of this country, to do with politicians, perhaps of all parties, what action do you propose to take?"

Mr Wilson replied, "I did not say Security Forces. I said there

was no evidence of South African Government participation . . . Anyone in this House concerned with democracy will feel revolted that we have to face such things in this country so far as leaders of any party or all parties are concerned."

Finally, to emphasise where he placed the blame, the Prime Minister said again, "I have made it clear that I do not believe I can find any evidence of responsibility on the part of the South African Government."

Courtiour was astonished at the similarity of the Prime Minister's allegations to those of Kenneth Wyatt and now felt that it would be possible to screen part of the material which they had filmed the day before. Lawyers were consulted about what could be used without abusing the *sub judice* rules and just the parts of his story which were in the area of the allegations made by Harold Wilson in Parliament were transmitted on the *Tonight* programme later that evening. In effect what it did was to help justify Mr Wilson's allegations and to give public support to Jeremy Thorpe and Peter Hain in their hour of need. So if Mr Wilson concerned himself with such matters, he must by this time have put down Courtiour's stories as very helpful journalism.

Shortly after these events, Barrie Penrose too entered into the "South African smear" arena.

In the burst of enthusiasm which followed the screening of the Wyatt interview, Courtiour was despatched to Spain where he spent three days searching vainly for Fouad Kamil at a number of addresses around Barcelona which he had been given by the defendants in the conspiracy case. Although this first trip was unsuccessful, towards the end of April he took a plane once again to Barcelona, this time on a tip that two South African journalists were also hunting for Kamil in the same area.

By one of those coincidences that later seem fated to happen, the reporter who had been working with Courtiour, David Taylor, was now in America. So when Courtiour rang through to London one weekend needing someone to make further checks with his sources, it was to Penrose that he turned for help. Penrose did some persistent work on the telephone to Kamil's wife in South Africa and then he flew to Barcelona to join Courtiour.

Before he left London, Penrose sorted out with News and Current Affairs Editors that there should be no conflict of interest between their two departments. Since Penrose worked for News, he would have to film two interviews with Kamil, one for the

*Tonight* programme and one for News. This was the kind of inter-departmental duplication that was unfortunately very common inside the BBC, but the fact that it established Penrose and Courtiour as a combined News and Current Affairs team was later to be quite significant when they were in touch with Sir Harold.

Almost two months to the day after Courtiour had first heard the story of the South African plot from Kenneth Wyatt, Kamil appeared at one o'clock in the morning, in the reporters' hotel. After eleven anxious days of waiting, any annoyance Courtiour felt at the odd hour of the visit was quickly forgotten.

He mumbled that he would fetch his colleague from another room further down the corridor, but Kamil told him sharply to stay where he was. His secretary was ordered to get Penrose out of bed.

"How do I know you are BBC?" Kamil pointed out. "You might have a hit man to kill me."

Broad-shouldered and weighing about sixteen stone, and perspiring in a very physical sort of way, Kamil began to chuckle. Courtiour himself was thin and weighed less than nine stone: he laughed back nervously, uncertain if the man was joking.

Initially Kamil seemed reluctant to talk publicly at all. Not until thirty-six hours later did he agree to face the camera and lights which were hastily set up in Courtiour's hotel bedroom. When he did, he sat there insisting that his fight was with Anglo American. Like Wyatt, Kamil said he knew nothing about politics. It was Sir Percy Sillitoe who had persuaded him to work for the Corporation. Sillitoe had retired as Head of MI5 in 1953 and had been hired by Sir Ernest Oppenheimer to investigate and stop losses caused to his companies through illegal diamond trafficking. Kamil went on at some length about how he had fallen out with Anglo American and then hijacked a Boeing 727 in his attempt to intimidate the Corporation. But he refused to corroborate, except in the most general terms, any of Wyatt's story. He insisted that the people in England must have had their own reasons for acting as they did. It was certainly not at his bidding.

And it became clear that he would not give details, if indeed he had any to give, of evidence that Anglo American had been interfering in British political life. All he would say was that in the course of one of his own investigations into possible corruption, code-named "Operation Executive", he had discovered what he claimed was evidence of the corruption of British and African officials. He alleged that in one period in the early 50s over £26

million had been paid in bribes. His evidence, he claimed, consisted of lists of monies paid and the people to whom they had been paid, and these were safely locked away in Switzerland.

The interview had not provided the hard evidence that Penrose and Courtiour had hoped for but it was still the first interview ever achieved with this strange figure, whose vendetta had made headlines around the world. It was transmitted on the *Tonight* programme on Friday 7 May, and on Saturday the 8th Sir Harold Wilson made another speech which dwelled once more on the dangers faced by the British democracy.

Courtior called Kenneth Wyatt and gave him the news that Kamil had disowned him. He was not surprised, but said he had a letter which he thought might be interesting.

This was a document which the *Times* was later to describe as semi-literate. It was addressed to the Rt Hon Harold Wilson, MP, The House of Commons, London, SW1, and purported to come from Johannesburg. In three pages it detailed the work of a secret group which had provided information to Kamil and Wyatt in order to foil, they claimed, a complicated plot hatched between Anglo American and the South African Government.

The letter alleged that Anglo American had been responsible for dealing in arms on behalf of the South African Government. And that documents showing the existence of a smear campaign had been taken from the security offices of Anglo American in Johannesburg. They included, the letter claimed, embarrassing information not only about Jeremy Thorpe and the Liberal Party but also about members of the British Labour Party and trades union leaders.

According to a note at the end of the letter, copies of it had been sent to among others, James Callaghan, Michael Foot, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Jeremy Thorpe, and Cyril Smith, as well as to a number of Commonwealth High Commissioners. So again Penrose and Courtiour found themselves dealing with something which linked them directly with prominent people in Whitehall. Later in the day Penrose had made a few quick calls and found that the office of Michael Foot, Lord President of the Council, had not in fact received the letter. So at the office's request he quickly arranged with Courtiour for a copy to be made and sent round to Whitehall by taxi.

Perhaps this small piece of journalistic opportunism had led to the call from Sir Harold Wilson's office.

## Chapter 4

On the morning after their first meeting with Sir Harold Wilson, Penrose and Courtiour drove into London together from their homes in the suburbs. Both reporters were again dressed neatly in dark lounge suits and sombre ties. They preferred casual clothes normally like many people working around the BBC's huge newsroom, but they were aware that this day could well turn out to be special.

Early in the morning the newsroom looked relatively calm. Only the incessant spluttering of the copy machines, bringing instant news from around the world, belied the seemingly relaxed atmosphere. At 12.45 the first news bulletin of the day would be transmitted on national television and nearer that deadline the mood would alter dramatically, at times becoming almost frenzied.

This was unfamiliar territory for Courtiour. A visit to the main television newsroom was, for him, a rare event. His office, where the *Tonight* programme was based, was nearly a mile away at Lime Grove. The physical distance emphasised the distinction the BBC drew between News and Current Affairs. Penrose sat down to type out the list of main points Sir Harold had given them in Lord North Street the previous evening.

Just before the daily 10 o'clock editorial conference, Courtiour and Penrose called in at Bob Kearsley's room. By this time the News Intake Editor had heard about the previous evening's meeting, and had been surprised to hear that a *Tonight* researcher had been present.

Listening to their account of what Sir Harold had said, Kearsley was startled but kept characteristically quiet at first.

Courtior was disappointed at the lack of enthusiasm. He desperately wanted to hear the first journalist they told respond with unqualified delight.

Penrose explained that Sir Harold had promised them his full cooperation. Obviously that offer was a marvellous opportunity, practically unprecedented. Did he not agree?

"I really don't know what the Editor here will say, mate," was

Kearsley's only comment. "Personally, management could get a coronary."

Reluctantly both reporters agreed with his assessment. Certainly the warning to them that the response from higher up might be negative was realistic. The Corporation's relationship with Harold Wilson and his Labour Government had rarely been close, never unblemished. The Prime Minister had publicly accused it of being anti-Labour and anti-Wilson.

Penrose felt on edge. A journalist must inevitably look for good stories. Invariably they depended on accurate inside information: good sources. He saw that there could be resistance to a temporary alliance with Sir Harold but he resented hearing about it. Damn, he thought, the elder statesman suggests he become their Deep Throat, their "big fat spider", and the BBC could find it "politically awkward". He explained his anxiety, emphasising that Wilson might approach Independent Television or newspapers if the Corporation proved unresponsive: potentially it was the best story or string of stories, that any of them had ever been offered.

Penrose felt that perhaps he had exaggerated his fears, underestimating the News Intake Editor. Kearsley was enthusiastic about working with Harold Wilson or any good source. But he had to be realistic at the outset about the BBC's view from the top.

"Once the 10 o'clock conference is over I'll talk to the Editor," he said pleasantly. "Must be a decision for the Director-General, though," he added.

Andrew Todd was the Editor of Television News, the man who managed the daily editorial control of its bulletins. He handled the ingredients of programmes which were seen by a potential audience of more than 40 million viewers.

It was mid-morning now and Kearsley had arranged a meeting with Todd.

Penrose was now convinced that the decision would be referred to the top. Todd was a powerful figure, but even he was probably not senior enough to decide outright whether the BBC would go along with Sir Harold's proposal. In any case, Courtiour represented Current Affairs' continuing interest in the story so another department chief in the hierarchy was automatically involved.

Kearsley had already asked Courtiour not to attend this conference with Todd, apologising but certain that he would understand the circumstances. The uneasy relationship between News

and Current Affairs was such an established fact that few people bothered to discuss the matter.

Kearsley, Penrose and Todd were joined by Derek Maude, an Assistant Editor, and Mike McKay, another reporter who had previously worked on the South African story.

"You seem to have got yourself caught up in a curious business," Todd said inquisitively. "And me too I suppose. Bob has been telling me about your visit to Sir Harold Wilson. And what do you think Wilson wants?"

Penrose handed him the top copy of the list of points Sir Harold had made at their meeting. The other three journalists eagerly took carbon copies and began reading them.

The list Penrose had typed out earlier in the morning included the grave fears Sir Harold had expressed about Western democracy. There was his unequivocal statement that "democracy was in danger". There was his concern about certain sections of Britain's Intelligence Services. Above all, there was his emphasis on the threat from South Africa. Penrose had also listed his hint about a "missing" Social Security file and to whom this file belonged. And he had completed his list of points by stressing that he and Courtiour had been asked to cooperate in investigating the areas that had been raised during their ninety-minute conversation.

At times the Editor reacted noticeably at what he read down the list.

"What's the old fox up to, do you imagine?"

His eyes returned to the bottom of the page.

"And Sir Harold says he is prepared to make all this public when you have done some digging?" He sounded sceptical.

"Apparently. I realise the whole affair strikes one as being rather bizarre," replied Penrose.

"And you mean to say he will give information about that South African business and . . .?" Todd interrupted his own question. "Why, why, why?" He shook his head in disbelief.

"We don't know *exactly* why yet," replied Penrose, understating things. "There's only been one meeting."

"But what is Wilson's motivation in telling you all this? Everybody knows he doesn't much care for the BBC."

It was evident that Todd gave no significance to the fact that Sir Harold had contacted Penrose at home.

"Clearly this is a decision for the Director-General," he said.



Derek Maude, the Assistant Editor, enquired how many copies of the list existed.

Penrose said there were just the four copies and Todd replied that three should be torn up while he kept the top copy on his desk. The others watched as Penrose collected the carbons together and tore them into small pieces.

"It shouldn't be left around the building," said Maude. "This is fucking dynamite if any of it gets out!"

Later that day, Penrose and Courtiour set off to find the government office Sir Harold had mentioned at their meeting the night before. They had been intrigued by his reference to a "missing" file, his insistence that it might turn out to be an important clue in their investigation.

Sir Harold had said Chelsea and the reporters discovered that Waterford House was the office that covered the Social Security services for the area. When they arrived, Courtiour explained to an attendant that they wished to see the manager and added that they were from BBC Television. The attendant went away and came back with a woman in her thirties.

"Oh, you're from the Press," she said, standing stiffly before them in the foyer. "I'm sorry, you'll have to leave."

"Could we have a more private chat with you?" asked Penrose.

"You'll have to speak with our Press Officers," she persisted looking nervously behind her. "The manager is out."

"You are Miss . . .?" began the reporter again.

"Miss Jones, Christine Jones," the clerk answered with embarrassment. She apologised that there was no spare interview room at Waterford House. The two reporters explained that it would only take a minute and they wanted no Press statement, only a certain guidance. Naturally she could not talk about individual cases, but perhaps she could head them in the right direction?

She said frankly she was nervous about journalists. There were firm departmental instructions in every Social Security office not to speak with the Press. Could they not go to the Press Bureau?

Courtior and Penrose were both well aware that civil servants had a habit of mentioning the Official Secrets Act when they were cornered. It was an all-embracing Act of Parliament that restrained clerks like Miss Jones, postmen, telephone-operators, and Government Ministers, from disclosing information even of the simplest kind. For many reporters the Official Secrets Act, and the petty use that civil servants made of it as a skirt to hide behind,

was a tiresome bugbear.

Penrose said, "We know you cannot talk about individual cases, Miss Jones, because of the Official Secrets Act, Section Two. And naturally we wouldn't want you to break your oath . . ."

"We wanted to know," Courtiour said plainly, "whether you have lost any files recently. Perhaps you have an important file that has gone missing? Someone who has recently been in the news?"

Miss Jones explained indignantly that such information was confidential.

"Surely whether a Social Security file is missing at Waterford House is not a state secret?" enquired Courtiour.

"Would you deny that an important file is missing?" said the two reporters together.

Miss Jones said she would not deny anything.

"But you have had a robbery here or something?" they speculated.

Miss Jones thought they should approach the police. Why not try Fulham Police Station? For the first time Penrose and Courtiour suspected they might be learning something.

"We can take it there has been a robbery of some kind?" they asked the clerk eagerly.

"Ask the police; I can't tell you."

"But does the name Norman Scott mean anything to you here at this branch?" Penrose enquired. "Has Scott's file been taken or stolen recently?"

Miss Jones looked perplexed now, perhaps distressed slightly by the interrogation. Penrose felt unhappy that she was upset, but he was anxious to confirm that they had found the right DHSS office. And frankly why should the file be provoking so much mystery?

"I really must go," said Miss Jones. "I can't say anything more."

Later that morning a young detective at Fulham Police Station said he did remember that there had been a break-in at Waterford House earlier that year. But he could not recall exactly which month it had occurred. Petty crime was so commonplace in the district.

At the end of the day the reporters decided to return to Lord North Street to speak with the ex-Prime Minister. Sir Harold had said they could approach him directly at any time and they took him at his word. It was Lady Wilson who opened the door for them this time.

The two reporters remained chatting with her until another

visitor departed. Lady Wilson said to them "Don't you think it simply awful what *they*'ve done to poor Jeremy Thorpe?" She clearly knew something of why the reporters were seeing her husband.

Sir Harold then appeared and asked Penrose and Courtiour to join him. He said at once that he had been perfectly serious about his offer the day before. They went on talking for another ninety minutes and this time he went into even greater detail about the grave matters of state which concerned him.

The reporters mentioned they had already started work; they had visited the government office in an effort to track down the missing Norman Scott file. Sir Harold appeared delighted and suggested they should also talk to a former member of his administration.

"Speak to Barbara Castle who was the Secretary of State in my Cabinet," he said. "She was at the DHSS when the file went missing. Tell her I sent you: she still regards me as her Prime Minister." He also mentioned the name of a prominent civil servant whom they should approach. The man had apparently visited government offices after dark in an attempt to locate the missing Scott file.

Sir Harold then added a warning. "When you ask the Department for an official explanation don't necessarily believe the answer," he said. "They'll probably tell you that Scott's papers have been 'weeded out': that's nonsense. I know the person who did the devilling after dark."

Courtiour began to feel conspiratorial. Penrose said they would make it a priority to see Barbara Castle.

"You'll find a connection with South Africa in that file," Sir Harold said confidently. "I know. Barbara should sing like a bird."

Shortly afterwards, still in considerable doubt about what they were seeking, Penrose and Courtiour arrived at Room 401 at the House of Commons and asked to see Barbara Castle. On the door, rather oddly, was a printed card bearing the name of the former Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart. Mrs Castle had presumably been allocated the room after being dismissed as a Cabinet Minister by James Callaghan. The Labour MP was a dynamic woman with red hair and a reputation for being a fiery outspoken politician. In recent years she had been the architect of a number of Government measures which she regarded as fundamental to its

social democratic policies but which had to be dropped because of the difficulty of forcing them through Parliament on a small Government majority.

The two reporters explained that they were enquiring into Sir Harold's claims about South African interference in British political life. They said the former Prime Minister had sent them to see her. Mrs Castle looked surprised, but made no comment.

Turning to the subject of South Africa, Mrs Castle mentioned that she had demonstrated outside South Africa House in Trafalgar Square at the time of the Sharpeville killings in 1960. She was also, she said, an ex-President of the Anti-Apartheid movement. She certainly had no love for the South African Government and had actively helped in getting them out of the British Commonwealth.

Mrs Castle, an experienced politician and a member of every Cabinet since Mr Wilson first became Premier in 1964, spoke unhesitatingly and openly. Courtiour asked if they could broach the subject of Norman Scott's "missing" Social Security file.

The politician's expression changed at once. She was flustered, irritated, asking why they had approached her. Courtiour mentioned that "her Prime Minister" had suggested they get in contact.

Rather to Penrose and Courtiour's astonishment, Mrs Castle now began to act exactly like Miss Jones and resorted to an incantation of the Official Secrets Act. But she suggested they speak to a civil servant she knew. It was the same man Sir Harold had mentioned a few days before.

"I cannot talk about an individual's personal file," she said, "even though I was the Secretary of State."

Courtiour pressed the question again: "Why was the file missing?"

"I cannot talk about the matter," Mrs Castle repeated curtly. She appeared startled. "Whatever we did, we did on higher authority. There was no question of personal motive or gain."

The two reporters were flabbergasted at her response. Who was "higher authority"? The Lord Chancellor? The Foreign Secretary perhaps? or the Home Secretary? And why the alarm in Mrs Castle's face which was now noticeably blanched from the abrupt turn in the conversation?

Mrs Castle stood up suddenly and announced that she must leave. She would speak to the senior civil servant she had named.

And she agreed to meet the two reporters again, although they sensed that she would not really welcome another meeting.

The interview with Mrs Castle disturbed the two reporters. They had expected to find her eager to help them. But in the event she had implied that they should not even be asking her questions and that she and others had done things "on higher authority".

The two reporters decided to see the civil servant at once and an hour after their meeting with Barbara Castle they arrived at his home in North London. When he let them in he was apparently not expecting to receive visitors so they hoped he had not already been warned by Mrs Castle that they might approach him about Scott's file.

Penrose and Courtiour were aware, as they began the conversation, that they were clutching at straws. But Barbara Castle had shown signs of embarrassment and, from the moment they entered, the civil servant also seemed acutely uncomfortable. His public record was one of advocating open government but from the start of the interview it was clear that he was not applying that principle today.

The newsmen explained that they had just left Barbara Castle at the Commons where they had talked to her about a missing file.

"I know nothing of a missing file," the civil servant said at once: "nothing."

"Belonging to Norman Scott?" Courtiour added, expecting Scott's name to provoke a reaction.

"I cannot say anything because of the Official Secrets Act," replied the civil servant.

"We have spoken to Barbara Castle about the missing file," Penrose said. "It was she who advised us to talk to you."

"I am not responsible for anything Barbara Castle may have told you," replied the man. "I know about the missing file but I have to take advice. I cannot talk about it."

Finally Penrose asked the man:

"What, I ask myself, is the connection between a homosexual's file at Waterford House and you? And why did you lie when we first arrived?"

"I am not compromised personally in this matter," the civil servant replied, apparently with some relief. He repeated that he would take advice from his Department and agreed to call them the following week.

Again the reporters were doubtful as they left his house whether he would actually contact them as he said. Although for the second time that day they had gathered only snippets of information, two very highly placed persons had now reacted to their questions as if they were being accused of some misdemeanour. What was it that put them so much on the defensive?

In the meantime the reporters decided after all to approach the DHSS Press Bureau as Miss Jones had suggested. They confined their enquiry to a vague question since they did not want to mention Norman Scott at that stage. Could the Bureau confirm the date of a burglary which had taken place at Waterford House? And what had been stolen during the raid? In fact, of course, they were not certain if there had been a robbery there or whether it had any connection at all with Scott's Social Security file.

A fortnight later John Orr from the Press Bureau called to confirm that Penrose and Courtiour had been right. There had been a robbery at Waterford House on the evening of 8 January that year. A safe had been stolen, but he did not know if a file had gone missing.

When supplied with the exact date, however, Scotland Yard were able to supply details.

A safe had been taken after a break-in and in the list of stolen items submitted to the police by the DHSS there was no mention of any missing Social Security file, certainly no reference to Norman Scott. Only blank Giro cheques, departmental rubber stamps and about £17 in cash appeared to have vanished with the safe.

Some time later Penrose was at home writing up his notes when Harold Wilson called him on the telephone. The reporter was astonished to hear the ex-Premier's distinctive voice at the other end, especially since Sir Harold had insisted they should not speak on an open public line. He was concerned, he had said, about eavesdroppers who, deliberately or accidentally, might be listening into his conversations. Penrose was therefore surprised that Sir Harold was now breaking rules which he had laid down strictly some weeks before.

"I saw -----," said the former Prime Minister, referring to the highly placed Government official he and Courtiour had met at his suggestion. "He's very worried. I've also had strong representations from Barbara [Castle]."

Sir Harold explained that the Government official was suspected

of having leaked information to the Press on quite another matter from the one they were investigating. So he had become acutely worried after the reporters had visited him. In some agitation, he had turned to the former Prime Minister for help.

"He is so much under suspicion for the other leak – everybody thinks he did it – that if he were mentioned in this context, even though it was under Prime Ministerial direction, he thinks he'd be finished," said Sir Harold gravely.

He paused for a moment and added that he had received even stronger representations from a powerful ex-Cabinet Minister whom they had been to see. Both the civil servant and the ex-Minister had expressed alarm at some of the enquiries the reporters had been making.

Sir Harold asked Penrose if the reporters would leave the man's name out of what they published. He did not mind in the least that he himself was being mentioned, but he would prefer it if the civil servant's name were excluded.

"I gave you personally – myself, nobody else – the story," Sir Harold explained. "All you need say is: 'The Prime Minister' – or Harold Wilson, however you like to describe me – 'asked for enquiries to be made . . .'"

The reporter went on to discuss another aspect of their story, adding that he and his colleague would like another meeting. Sir Harold cheerfully agreed. Penrose would arrange a time and date with the intermediary.

For a moment the reporter wondered if he had been right to agree not to mention the civil servant's name in their story. This might be interpreted by some people as an interference with their impartiality as journalists. He reflected on the fact that so far Sir Harold had not laid down any real ground rules for their discussions. He had certainly not made any such requests before.

As long as it was clear that Sir Harold himself had been the "higher authority" who had been personally responsible for the "private devilling", that seemed to be the most important point. Indeed, the very fact that the former Prime Minister had "broken his cover" to call Penrose seemed a further confirmation of how unusual his concern had been to know what would be revealed by the "missing" government file.

## Chapter 5

The day after the BBC meeting with the Editor of Television News, Penrose and Courtiour were summoned urgently to Broadcasting House. There Courtiour was introduced to Andrew Todd and then to Sandy Hope, the Deputy Head of News and Current Affairs. The Head of the Department, Desmond Taylor, was away on what the BBC officially called "leave" rather than vacation.

Todd was obviously keen to get to the point of the meeting.

"Look, the Director-General wants to meet Sir Harold," he said quickly. "Do you have a phone number where we can reach him?"

Penrose politely pointed out that he had been specifically asked by Sir Harold not to use the phone.

"Look, we must reach him at once for the D-G; Sir Charles leaves for Yugoslavia later today."

Penrose explained that Sir Harold had told them to keep in touch via an intermediary whose number they had been given. Penrose rang him and said that the Director-General would like to meet Sir Harold.

"Fine, I'll talk to him and call straight back," he replied quietly.

The four men stood waiting. A minute later the phone rang.

"Sir Harold would be happy to see the D-G at Lord North Street; he's waiting there now."

Penrose passed the message to Todd who relayed it to the Director-General's Chief Assistant, Peter Hardiman Scott. The Editor was told that Sir Charles Curran and the two reporters would visit Sir Harold. Nobody else would join them. As an outsider, Courtiour gained the impression that Hope and Todd were surprised the Director-General had chosen to go alone. Perhaps they had misgivings about two subalterns riding along with the Field-Marshal.

Neither reporter knew much about Sir Charles Curran. In the past the outstanding Directors-General of the BBC had behaved like great newspaper proprietors, concerned above all with the tenor of programmes. Sir Charles's reputation was largely built on his abilities as an administrator and figurehead. Courtiour had

looked him up in *Who's Who* which listed his previous experience of journalism as a few months as assistant editor of *Fishing News*. He had become Director-General via the Secretariat, the BBC's administrative body.

Courtiour found the Director-General far less aloof than he had expected him to be. He was friendly, intrigued to meet the former Premier before flying off to a meeting of the European Broadcasting Union. He explained that he was inquisitive about Sir Harold's motives in talking with the two journalists.

Penrose was attracted by the spirit in which Sir Charles joined in their first discussion about Harold Wilson. Intriguingly, he said "almost everything fitted". Not long before, he had heard about a rift within British Intelligence.

"You must not hear about security matters, of course," he warned them.

The Director-General said his primary concern was the danger Sir Harold might risk in inadvertently breaking his Privy Councillor's oath. In the passion of a conversation the two journalists might be told of affairs of state which should remain secret.

Courtiour reminded the Director-General of a few of the events that might be relevant to their meeting and stressed that South Africa had been discussed by Sir Harold with particular forthrightness.

But the picture of political interference that had been presented inside Parliament on 9 March would now seem to have been a mere preliminary sketch. During their three hours of conversation with Sir Harold it had become increasingly apparent that the subject was more complex and his warnings more grave in their implications. Or did the Director-General, familiar as he was with the stresses of wielding power at the top of his own field, find Sir Harold's doubts and fears less alarming than did the two reporters?

On arrival, Sir Harold gave a friendly nod to the two younger men and shook the Director-General's hand.

"Very good of you all to come here so quickly, Sir Charles. Please follow me."

"They know the way," he added, glancing at Courtiour and Penrose with a smile.

The reporters asked if the Director-General might prefer to speak with Sir Harold alone, at least in the beginning? The BBC chief looked across at the politician who made no reply, but

they interpreted his silence as agreement that they should wait downstairs.

While Penrose and Courtiour waited, one question was uppermost in their minds: would the Director-General give them the backing to begin their investigation? The reporters needed financial support desperately. A project like this demanded large resources for it to succeed. Air tickets, telephones and countless other expenses needed underwriting. Both Courtiour and Penrose were aware that they could not subsidise the research with their own meagre resources.

At first they had debated whether they should even inform the BBC, or anyone, about their Deep Throat, wondering whether disclosing his identity might jeopardise the venture. But the practical problems of finding an outlet for their work, and the cash to sponsor it, had overridden their initial reservations. There was also their long association with the BBC. Although they were both freelance journalists they thought of themselves as BBC men and until they had spoken to Bob Kearsley had scarcely considered that the Corporation's interests might not be the same as their own. Now it was too late to turn back. They had no contingency plan if the Director-General turned down the idea.

Through good fortune and months of concentrated work by Courtiour in particular, they were offering to the BBC one of the best sources ever available and yet there was the possibility that he and they could be rejected.

After what could only have been a minute or two, they were beckoned up into the long drawing-room.

"Sir Charles and I have had a chat. I've put him in the picture," said Sir Harold.

"We have agreed that you two will exchange information and documents on a confidential basis at first," said the Director-General.

"Later we'll all go public with what we find," interrupted Sir Harold. "That's right, isn't it?" Sir Charles nodded his acceptance slowly.

"This sort of work takes time," said Sir Harold.

Sir Charles nodded.

"I see it as a slow burner. I imagine a number of leads which might make news items . . . Eventually perhaps a longer film . . ."

Penrose and Courtiour sat listening to the two men, saying little themselves. They hoped their faces did not reveal the excitement



they were feeling inside. Not only did they have access to a high-ranking source, a statesman who had led one of the world's greatest democracies for nearly a decade and who wanted his name to go into the history books alongside Pitt, Disraeli and Churchill: but they had also just been promised the backing of the most powerful broadcasting institution in the world.

For Sir Charles's benefit, Sir Harold repeated some of the points he had already made to the two reporters. He said that Western democracy itself was facing a crisis when one country interfered in the internal affairs of another. He mentioned South Africa first, but also his fears that "slush funds" from West Germany had been used to discredit his Government and himself. With the Director-General listening carefully, he spoke of other countries being involved, including the United States, and went over some of the specific leads which he had given earlier to Penrose and Courtiour.

"I am being absolutely serious, make no mistake about that," he said defiantly, raising the level of his voice, "when I say that democracy itself, as we know it in the West, is in great danger.

"If anybody else approaches me for an interview I shall instruct my political office to deal with them in the normal way. Otherwise I shall not know who is coming to me from the BBC or on this special investigation."

The Director-General agreed that only Courtiour and Penrose would have access to Sir Harold. There should be the greatest confidentiality about the project.

Sir Harold pointed out that he had already shown them his new safe: their security should be just as good.

Once they had left the house, Sir Charles gave his own immediate reaction to the extraordinary meeting.

"I am impressed with what I heard and think we should cooperate with him in the way we agreed." He too spoke solemnly, choosing his words with the utmost care.

"He seemed sincere in what he said, but I always question what his motivation might ultimately be."

Sir Charles added that he was "certain he did not need to explain further what he had in mind". He looked at them both, leaning forward towards Courtiour and then turning to his colleague.

The two of them thought they knew.

## Chapter 6

A month after Harold Wilson had pointed an accusing finger in Parliament at South African "business interests", a slim, modishly dressed 20-year-old youth called André Thorne approached the liberal daily newspaper the *Guardian* with rather an unpleasant sounding story: he knew about a "blue" film in which a well-known Liberal MP, dressed as a scoutmaster, was engaged in illegal sexual acts with young boys. Such exaggerated stories were seldom to be trusted but the paper asked its reporter Peter Hillmore to look into Thorne's claims, because an unusual feature of this one was that two men from the South African Embassy in London were said to have shown interest in the film.

André Thorne had approached the *Guardian* on 15 April. But when Hillmore spoke to him it emerged that he had already told the police his story the previous August. He had also spoken to another newspaper months before. However, on Thursday 15 April, the youth went, as invited, to the South African Embassy and spoke with Johan Russouw, who had the rank of Second Secretary. When he left the Embassy he told Hillmore that the diplomat had asked him if he could get hold of the film featuring the Liberal MP. Apparently Russouw had stressed repeatedly that his interest in it was purely personal and that it did not have anything to do with either the Embassy or the South African Government.

From a nearby hotel, Thorne called Russouw again and said he wanted to help Russouw but in order to find the film he would need to visit various clubs and he had no money.

"He was asked to go back," the reporter wrote later. "When he entered the Embassy he had no money on him whatsoever – when he came back he had £5 and numerous packets of cigarettes. He said that Mr Russouw told him they would talk about money if he found the film."

When Thorne reported to Russouw that he had the film, he made an appointment to see the diplomat again at South Africa House, and this time Hillmore accompanied him. They took a film

canister containing some developed film but in fact it was a television food advertisement, not a "blue" movie about a well-known British politician.

The youth and the reporter-in-disguise were taken into Russouw's office where Hillmore noticed "that a tape-recorder was concealed on a window ledge, behind a curtain".

The diplomat admitted that he was very suspicious of people approaching his Embassy because of the accusations from Westminster that South Africans had been meddling in British political life. Again the diplomat emphasised that his interest in the film was personal and nothing to do with the Embassy.

"He said that South Africa House could not care which political party was in power," Hillmore reported later.

Russouw maintained that he simply wanted to see the film as he had not had the opportunity of seeing a pornographic film before.

At this point, Hillmore suddenly introduced himself as a *Guardian* reporter and left the Embassy with Thorne.

"Later in the day," he continued, "an official of the Embassy told another *Guardian* reporter that Mr Russouw had smelled a rat and that everything was on tape. The official said that if the *Guardian* published a report of the meeting the name of the politician would become known. 'The tape is our trump card,' he said."

Amid protests from Chris Van de Walt, the Director of Information at South Africa House, the newspaper nevertheless went ahead and published its story on 15 May.

Dr Hilgard Muller, South Africa's Minister of Foreign Affairs, commented on 18 May that the allegations concerning Mr Russouw were manufactured and that efforts had been made to turn the affair into a political football. Dr Muller added: "The name of the British personality who was named by the other party has naturally been withheld for obvious reasons."

Now it was the turn of the new British Prime Minister, James Callaghan, to express his opinion in the charged atmosphere surrounding the affair. He said in the House of Commons: "It is quite clear Mr Russouw exceeded the expectations of any diplomat in any country."

Rarely had a departing diplomat been shown the yellow card so publicly in Britain before. The British Premier had apparently set aside normal diplomatic protocol in the heat of the moment. However, on 23 May, the *Sunday People* carried the headline: "I

LIED ABOUT THAT BLUE FILM — says man in South Africa smear case".

The youth had apparently made a sworn statement saying: "I have lied and lied from the very beginning." His whole story about the film and the men he claimed had visited his home in south London was said to have been a lie.

A triumphant Chris Van de Walt at the South African Embassy told the *Sunday People*: "This confirms conclusively our original and adamant statement that neither South Africa nor the Embassy has ever been involved in the activities reported in the *Guardian*."

Now that André Thorne had changed his testimony, the *Guardian* was in an awkward position. But Peter Preston, the newspaper's editor, was in no mood to apologise or backtrack. He stood by Peter Hillmore's report. It was for the police to evaluate the statements made by Mr Thorne to the *Guardian*, to the *Sunday People*, and to themselves. The *Guardian* had cooperated fully with the Home Office and the police from the first moment investigations began.

Most rival newspapers thought that the *Guardian* and Peter Hillmore had been fooled and said so plainly. The strong implication was that *they* would not so easily have been taken in by such an obviously trumped-up tale. Almost alone in drawing attention to the pertinent questions which remained unanswered was the *New Statesman*. In a front-page editorial on 21 May a leader writer asked: "What was a diplomat doing soliciting a visit from an ex-Borstal boy to a foreign embassy and then meeting him in diplomatic territory on two occasions?"

The *New Statesman* went on to criticise "the typically ungenerous reaction of the rest of the press to the *Guardian*'s coup." The writer believed that "such reactions merely play Dr de Wet's [the South African Ambassador] game for him — and whatever game that may ultimately turn out to have been, it is already plain that it is not, and never has been, cricket."

It was while the British Press and the British Government were playing these elaborate games — whatever they might be — of accusation, retraction and counter-accusation that Penrose and Courtiour became involved in their own version of what seemed to them, from the battering they suffered, more like a wrestling match. The distinguishing feature of the André Thorne affair was that for the first time, in the eyes of some people, the South African Government itself had been shown to be involved in

gathering "smear" ammunition. In the instances of Hain, Kamil and Wyatt, the connection had possibly been not with the Government in Pretoria, but with what Sir Harold Wilson called "South African business interests". But now the accusations had gone a step further.

The André Thorne story had first appeared on Saturday 15 May. On the following Monday Penrose was reading Hillmore's article again in the BBC's newsroom when Courtiour came up to him and whispered: "Peter Hain says an ex-British intelligence officer has been in touch with the Liberal Party. Claims he's got evidence of the smear campaign."

Courtior explained that he had arranged for them to meet Andrew Gifford, a special assistant to David Steel who was at that time the Liberal Chief Whip.

Gifford confirmed that a man calling himself "a retired intelligence officer" had approached the Party and that he and a colleague, Simon Hebditch, had arranged to rendezvous with the man outside Westminster Abbey on Thursday 13 May.

When the man arrived he was neatly suited and wearing dark glasses, and he had a distinctly military bearing. He insisted that their meeting must be confidential, so the three men went to a snack-bar in the vicinity. There they began looking at documents which the "retired intelligence officer" pulled out from a light brown briefcase.

In the prevailing climate, the two political aides were very suspicious. But the documents, which included confidential letters from the South African Embassy, and the story which the man told were sufficient to convince Gifford and Hebditch that a meeting with David Steel might prove worthwhile.

At his meeting at the House of Commons with Penrose and Courtior, Gifford looked faintly annoyed that news of the man's approach had already leaked out to the Press. Reporters from the *Rand Daily Mail*, *Time* magazine and the *Guardian* also seemed to know about the man's existence. All he would say further was that the man would be meeting David Steel the following morning, Tuesday 18 May. The two reporters could probably meet him afterwards.

Penrose recognised Gifford's expression of non-cooperation only too well. In his present mood there seemed little chance that he would willingly disclose the mysterious colonel's name and address.

Penrose turned to the political aide and slapped him lightly on the shoulder. Surely Gifford had not meant the man who came from, where was it now, "somewhere in the country"? (The reporter imagined most retired officers retired to the country.) Gifford looked genuinely surprised.

Penrose began laughing. "Damn it, we interviewed an intelligence colonel only yesterday," he said, thinking of the other newsmen who were already in the chase. "Great interview: great film."

"You mean the colonel from a village in Kent, near . . ." Gifford paused. "Somewhere near Ashford, that's it?" he said, pleased that he had remembered. "Benenden . . . something like that . . . Bonnington. I've got the address in my office."

The reporters could not believe their good luck: hopefully nobody else had the information: Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Cheeseman of Bonnington in Kent.

From outside Westminster Abbey Penrose called the newsroom. He wanted a TV crew immediately.

After their fast drive to Bonnington, the reporters were relieved to see no signs of rival newsmen in the country village.

Having arranged for the TV crew to wait out of sight, they found Mrs Cheeseman at the side of her cottage. Two young children smiled at the strangers from London. They explained that they had come to see her husband and asked if he was about.

Mrs Cheeseman spoke quietly, almost in a whisper. "I expect you've come from the Liberal Party," she said at once. "How dreadful what happened to them. I'm so happy we didn't emigrate to South Africa after all."

Her husband was not at home, she explained. But he would return later in the afternoon and she suggested that they come back then to meet him.

When Courtior and Penrose pulled up for the second time outside Holmwood Cottage, they found a slim, smallish man with short well-groomed dark hair, standing in the middle of the rather untidy garden.

The reporters introduced themselves as journalists from the BBC. Colonel Cheeseman seemed puzzled.

"Do you have any identification with you?" he asked somewhat sharply, his face drawn together in a tight frown. "Do you have special clearance or something?" he went on, taking a careful look at their BBC passes.

He sounded more like an American than an Englishman, but his accent was not very pronounced. At first he seemed at a loss for words, surprised by their unexpected visit.

Courtiour told him they had heard about his existence earlier in the day. Colonel Cheeseman wanted to know where they had got his name and address but the reporter took care not to mention David Steel's office.

"No wonder the Liberal Party is in such a shambles," Cheeseman said with resigned exasperation. His American accent sounded oddly out of place in the remote Kent village and Gifford had been right about his military air.

With his well-pressed lovat-green suit, shining polished shoes and clipped speech, he certainly looked like a retired soldier.

"Look, I'm very sorry but I really can't discuss matters with you this afternoon," he said, with a note of finality about his decision. "Much too soon."

"I was promised that my family and I would not be embarrassed over this matter. No personal publicity."

Neither reporter asked him what he meant by "much too soon". Both were inwardly convinced that at any moment other newsmen would begin arriving in Bonnington. They explained that the Press knew already about his Tuesday morning rendezvous with David Steel. Publicity in the papers was a foregone conclusion.

Penrose put the point bluntly: "If you have evidence of South African interference in Britain, why not make it public?"

Such an idea was apparently out of the question. The Colonel wanted no publicity. He and his family wanted simply to be left alone.

"Frankly, old boy," he said, "I wish I'd never contacted the Liberals last week." He walked away slowly towards his cottage, but then turned around. "No doubt you'd like some coffee?"

Colonel Cheeseman took his guests into a tiny living-room and for a moment they stood there awkwardly. Every inch and corner seemed coated in a different shade of dull fawn, and the low ceiling and skirting boards were badly in need of re-painting.

The Colonel asked them to sit down, and in fact, there were only three seats to choose from: a worn brown armchair and two scuffed dining-chairs. The Cheeseman family clearly did not live in comfort. Courtiour thought their cottage looked like the temporary rented accommodation soldiers often used. The absence of a personal touch suggested to him that they expected to be moved

on again on active service, and not that this was a place to which they had chosen to retire. He watched as Colonel Cheeseman reached into a brown cupboard and took out a polished, light brown leather briefcase – probably the one that Gifford had mentioned earlier.

Several letters addressed to Colonel Cheeseman from the Office of the Armed Forces Attaché at the South African Embassy in London were handed over to the reporters. One letter, dated 22 July, and stamped confidential, was from a Major R. C. Van Blerk giving the name of "the person whom you should contact on arrival in South Africa", Commandant J. F. J. van Rensburg, and his phone number, Pretoria 48-2281, extension 24.

Colonel Cheeseman explained that in March 1974 he had gone to the South African Embassy in London to enquire about a missing relative whom he wished to contact.

While he was at the Embassy, the Colonel had been approached by Major Van Blerk who eventually asked him if he was interested in emigrating to South Africa. There were vacancies for retired military officers and the pay and conditions were attractive.

Major Van Blerk had subsequently written to Colonel Cheeseman on several occasions, finally offering to fly him to Pretoria at the South African authorities' expense, and then sending him the letter dated 22 July 1974.

Colonel Cheeseman had kept his plane ticket showing that he had in fact flown to Johannesburg on 31 August 1974, and returned to London in September.

"The South African military authorities were interested in recruiting me because of my service record," he explained quietly, smoking a cigarette. "I served in the RAF during the war, the Royal Canadian Air Force and then the United States Air Force."

Colonel Cheeseman took out another batch of documents showing that he joined the RAF in September 1942 as an AC1 Mechanic, leaving on 31 May 1945 to join the RCAF. A "Statement of Service in the Canadian Armed Forces" showed that he had joined the RCAF in Cairo on 1 June 1945, and had been given an "honourable discharge" six months later in Calgary.

Courtiour looked again at the papers. According to the Canadians he was born in Toronto in 1924, while the British showed him as born in Portsmouth, England, in 1926. Colonel Cheeseman

dismissed the discrepancy as being of no real significance. He hinted that in intelligence work such differences were not uncommon.

The Colonel had a large file of documents detailing his service with the USAF and later the US Army. On one US Army document his place of birth was shown as Portsmouth, England, again, while on his USAF papers it was given as Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 18 December 1924.

The papers, like most military personnel records, were crowded with information and detail.

Frederick Cheeseman had been at US Air Force bases all over America and in Germany. In 1952 he had completed a course at the Florida Police Academy; in 1959 he had attended a "Counter-Intelligence Operational Course" at Fort Meade, Maryland.

Courtiour continued to make quick notes of the papers which Colonel Cheeseman passed to him, while Penrose looked for letters and other documents which related to his visit to South Africa in 1974. Precisely why had he gone to Pretoria?

"The purpose of the visit," explained Cheeseman, "was that they wanted to offer me a job at 16,800 Rand [about £10,700] to work for BOSS [Bureau for State Security]. When I arrived in South Africa in late August 1974 I met Commandant van Rensburg at the Department of Military Intelligence at the New Peyton Centre in Pretoria."

While at BOSS headquarters later, Colonel Cheeseman said he was asked to meet a Mr Kemp for a briefing on current operations.

A tall pile of files was put on Kemp's desk.

"There were a series of dossiers, about fifteen in all," said the Colonel. "These were research profiles of Jeremy Thorpe, Cyril Smith, Richard Wainwright and possibly David Steel.

"I only really saw the outer copies and I didn't want to make myself too nose. The dossiers were described to me as research documents which could be put to good use in Britain later."

Colonel Cheeseman said he had met several BOSS staff officers, and he had been introduced to the Head of the Bureau, General Van den Bergh, who talked to him about his potential role. He could be helpful to BOSS in training agents for future work in the neighbouring state of Zambia.

The reporters went over the Colonel's basic story once more. He

was saying quite categorically that he had visited the headquarters of the South African Government's Intelligence Agency in Pretoria and had seen dossiers there about British politicians, including Jeremy Thorpe. He had seen these dossiers in September 1974 and he was told then that the information they contained was to be used as part of a smear campaign to discredit the politicians and their parties.

The Colonel confirmed each of these points once more. "Officers working for the Bureau," he said, "made no secret of the political aim behind their information-gathering."

Penrose and Courtiour stared hard at each other. They knew that each of them was thinking the same. Here they were, having met Sir Harold Wilson only five days before and having been told by him that there was a danger to democracy. And here was this man Cheeseman, apparently an intelligence officer and apparently still on active service either for the Americans or for the British or for both, who seemed to be confirming the worst of Sir Harold's fears that not just business companies but the actual government of South Africa was meddling in British politics in the nastiest of ways. So had they already found exactly what – according to Sir Harold – they were supposed to be looking for?

It seemed in many ways too good to be true: almost as if they were being handed the answer on a plate. And whatever Colonel Cheeseman meant from his own point of view when he said it was "much too soon", that certainly seemed to apply to themselves. When the Director-General of the BBC had made his agreement with Sir Harold, both men had agreed that the affair would be a "slow burner". There had been talk about an initial period of six months for the investigation before the ex-Prime Minister and the Broadcasting Corporation could "go public".

Yet they had already been warned that other newsmen were only about five minutes behind them in getting to Cheeseman. If they were to decide now that the intelligence officer's information would simply be placed in their file and that they would not use it publicly, what was likely to happen? There was no way that the rest of the media were going to leave the story alone. Fleet Street were simply going to get the credit for their fast-moving work in getting to Cheeseman first. To be scooped like that, of their own accord, stuck in the two reporters' gullets, particularly in that of Penrose. He was known around the newsroom for his way of rushing after stories, almost to the point of being



too impetuous at times: that was an essential part of his make-up as a freelance journalist, and it earned him his fees from the BBC.

For Courtiour, too, again this story of Cheeseman's was only a kind of extension of the work he had been doing before. It bore a strong resemblance to the story he had obtained from Kenneth Wyatt, and indeed the initial information on Cheeseman's existence had come through his close contact with Peter Hain. The "South African smear" business was in the air right now – just think of the furore that had been started by the André Thorne story in the *Guardian* only a couple of days ago – so the timing of Cheeseman's appearance was perfect.

In effect their decision was taken. Somehow they had to put Cheeseman on film and then the editors back in London could reach their own verdict on whether the material should be screened. They had the authority of the Director-General behind them now, but they were not at the stage of taking their own editorial decisions on an important item of news.

So they applied themselves further to the problem of wooing Cheeseman. Would he agree to be interviewed on film and give them an opportunity to verify his credentials further?

Gradually the three of them talked in greater detail about Cheeseman's visit to BOSS headquarters and then Penrose reminded the Colonel that his story was already known in some quarters of Fleet Street: it was only a matter of hours before the other reporters found him.

"Why don't you make a statement in a BBC interview and leave it at that?" asked Courtiour, hoping for a fuller exclusive on the *Tonight* programme as well.

Eventually the Colonel agreed, and the camera crew, who had been patiently waiting, were called in. For more than two hours he went over his story on film. Afterwards he allowed the team to film some, but not all, of his documents.

Penrose was aware that Colonel Cheeseman could have invented his whole story. He might well be one of the "fantasists, exhibitionists, paranoiacs and frauds" who, one writer said, were creating confusion over the so-called Pretoria connection. But if the story was to be screened the next evening they still had time to check it out when they returned to London.

On film Penrose asked Colonel Cheeseman: "Perhaps a lot of people will say that your allegations about South Africa are pure

moonshine. That perhaps you're a Walter Mitty character. What have you got to prove what you're alleging?"

Colonel Cheeseman said immediately: "The proof of my presence, the proof of my attitude, the proof of my training and the proof of my determination to stop any organisation, covert or otherwise, attacking the institutions of this country."

Early the next morning the reporters began making the essential checks. Penrose put in a call to the United States Embassy in London: had they heard of a Colonel Frederick Cheeseman? The answer would be available later.

The two BBC men made further calls to check his story.

Cheeseman had spoken about having met officials from the Weapons Division of the British Aircraft Corporation just before Christmas 1974. He had met J. A. C. Smith-Shand and V. C. Sheather, respectively Principal Sales Engineer Air Defence and Head of Sales Services from BAC, at a party in the Military Attaché's wing at South Africa House in London. Major-General H. R. Meintjes, Armed Forces Attaché, and another Attaché, Major Van Blerk, had been present.

Penrose found this an interesting piece of circumstantial evidence about Cheeseman's acceptability to the South Africans so he called BAC at Stevenage and asked to speak to Smith-Shand and his colleague Vic Sheather. Both men recalled the party at the Embassy. But neither could remember meeting a colonel called Frederick Cheeseman.

"But that's not surprising," said Smith-Shand. "You must realise we do meet rather a lot of military types in our job. Can't remember everyone's name and rank."

Penrose asked Sheather why officials from BAC's Weapons Division were at the South African Embassy in the first place. Labour were in power in 1974 and they had a policy not to sell arms to the South Africans.

"Oh, governments come and go," replied Sheather. "Got to keep the customer warm in case the political situation changes." It seemed a nicely pragmatic attitude.

Cheeseman had also recalled that the BAC representatives had presented the South Africans with a model of a satellite, which was now hanging on the wall opposite the window. Yes, Sheather did recall a gift being made to General Meintjes.

Later, in the BBC's television studio, Courtiour filmed the Colonel as he chatted on the telephone with Commandant

Hamman, a Military Attaché at the Embassy. The men talked about Major Van Blerk, who had now left London, and about BOSS officials Cheeseman had met in Pretoria. Hamman arranged to have lunch with him on the following Thursday.

Cheeseman had also said he had collected a long list of telephone numbers when he was in Pretoria. Some were for the Department of Military Intelligence, others were for BOSS headquarters. But he also had a few home numbers for DMI and BOSS personnel.

Penrose began direct-dialling numbers from the list at random. Repeatedly he found himself talking with DMI or BOSS officials. Twice he actually mentioned Colonel Cheeseman's name.

"How is the Colonel?" asked a major cheerfully. "Give my very best wishes to Fred," said another.

David Steel interrupted one of the reporter's calls to South Africa by calling from the House of Commons. He confirmed that he had spoken to Cheeseman and would be sending photocopies of documents that Cheeseman had left with his office to the Foreign Secretary. The Foreign Office could look into the matter. So far, he himself had not made up his mind whether "Colonel" Cheeseman was telling the truth.

"The trouble is," he explained, "there have been so many people approaching us recently with talk of plots and smear campaigns."

Later that day, Courtiour and Penrose walked over to South Africa House and asked to speak with Chris Van de Walt, but he appeared to be out. So they asked to see Commandant Hamman: the Military Attaché to whom Colonel Cheeseman had spoken less than three hours before.

The journalists were introduced to a powerful-looking man in his mid-forties. Courtiour explained that a man calling himself Colonel Cheeseman had shown them correspondence he had received from the Embassy and spoken about a trip he had made to DMI and BOSS headquarters in South Africa.

Hamman looked rather puzzled as he glanced down at letters which a predecessor, Major Van Blerk, had sent to "Dear Colonel Cheeseman" two years before.

"Do you know this Colonel Frederick Cheeseman?" Penrose asked. The soldier diplomat paused for a moment.

"Colonel Cheeseman? Let me think: Colonel Cheeseman? No I don't know that name," he answered solemnly.

Commandant Hamman called in his superior officer Major-General Meintjes to look at the letters signed by Major Van Blerk. The reporters were taken into another room and both immediately noticed the model satellite hanging from the wall opposite the window.

General Meintjes was the Chief Military Attaché at the Embassy. Courtiour repeated what had already been explained to Commandant Hamman.

"Yes, Colonel Cheeseman came to see us here about a job," he said at once. "I know him, of course. He went to see our military authorities in Pretoria."

Taking deep breaths as he spoke, just as Cheeseman had described, Meintjes said that Colonel Cheeseman was "a good operator".

"What's his game now then?", asked Meintjes suddenly, apparently perplexed by the sudden appearance of two journalists.

Courtior went through Cheeseman's basic story, adding that he alleged he had seen dossiers about British politicians at BOSS headquarters. Cheeseman's filmed interview would probably be broadcast later in the day.

The General's mood began to change rapidly. Courtiour asked if he denied Colonel Cheeseman's claims? "No comment," he snapped back angrily. "I can say nothing until I contact our authorities in South Africa."

"I've already spoken with officials at DMI and BOSS," said Penrose. "Cheeseman gave me a lot of phone numbers; they all seemed accurate." The General began shaking his head in disbelief.

Commandant Hamman interrupted and said he did now remember the name of Colonel Cheeseman. Courtiour reminded him politely that earlier in the day he had, indeed, arranged to have lunch with the Colonel. Hamman said nothing in reply, turning dejectedly towards the window.

That night on television Richard Baker began the BBC's Nine O'Clock News with Frederick Cheeseman as its lead story. Millions of viewers heard him say: "A man describing himself as a former Lieutenant-Colonel, 51-year-old Frederick Albert Cheeseman, has alleged that he was shown files in South Africa collected in an attempt to discredit British politicians."

Penrose sat on Baker's left, warm under the strong studio lights, listening to the filmed interview with Cheeseman. At the end of

the insert, he added his live summary of the meeting which had taken place with General Meintjes and Commandant Hamman earlier in the day.

Next morning Colonel Cheeseman dominated the front pages of newspapers in Britain and South Africa. Even on the Continent and in America the mysterious "spy" was being written about. By late morning Frederick Cheeseman had been tracked down to his home.

Reporters from local and national papers, TV and radio commentators rushed down to Bonnington. However, villagers told them that Cheeseman was a palpable phoney. According to them, "Colonel" Cheeseman had never served in any air force. Moreover, he lived off Social Security and his landlady said the Cheeseman family owed her back rent. By the end of the afternoon, reporters had discovered that Colonel Cheeseman had been "unemployed" for years.

The Pentagon apparently had not heard of any officer called Frederick Albert Cheeseman. And from South Africa came denials that Cheeseman had ever visited BOSS headquarters. General Van den Bergh put out an immediate statement to the world's Press to the effect that he had not met Cheeseman and the man had not been offered a job with his organisation.

Courtiour and Penrose heard these counterclaims about the "Colonel" with a mixture of disbelief and despair. They were being subjected to the same process as the *Guardian* was experiencing over André Thorne.

The papers, which the day before had lifted the BBC story straight to their front pages, now began chuckling at "Colonel" Cheeseman's hoax.

"THE SPY WHO CAME IN OFF THE DOLE", said one headline. "Colonel Bogus, simply spyman", said the London *Daily Mirror* under an even bigger headline which shouted: "UNMASKED".

The *Daily Express* carried an exclusive interview with "Colonel" Cheeseman, who was now being called "the phoney spy" in most of the papers.

The "Colonel" was reported to have said, "Now I can live with myself as plain Fred Cheeseman instead of the phoney spy image I built up. The whole story about me being a spy and trying to infiltrate the South African Intelligence Agency was made up . . . I'm sorry I hoaxed the nation."

But the *Express* carried no mention of the military documents

which the BBC had been shown. According to its report, Cheeseman had last served in the United States armed forces in 1952. He had left the services as a sergeant, not a colonel.

In the Editor's suite, Alan Protheroe was sitting in an armchair looking forlorn. As the Deputy Editor of TV News he had taken the final decision to run the Cheeseman story. And he was particularly conscious that he had made the decision to show only one of Cheeseman's letters from the South African Military Attaché's office. Then a voice broke into the near-silence of his office. On the BBC's internal news service, over a loudspeaker system, came a message about the Cheeseman story.

"The BBC's correspondent in Johannesburg, Clive Small, says that General Van den Bergh, the head of the Bureau for State Security, has now stated publicly that he did meet Frederick Cheeseman at BOSS headquarters in Pretoria."

Twenty-four hours before the General had denied meeting Cheeseman in 1974. Could BOSS at last be catching up with messages which General Meintjes had undoubtedly been sending from the South African Embassy in London? Or with its own internal reports that a BBC reporter had been calling BOSS personnel at their homes and offices?

In any event, Alan Protheroe jumped to his feet with sudden enthusiasm. He told the reporters he had never been in any doubt that, whatever Frederick Cheeseman turned out to be, he did not believe he was a simple crank.

In the late afternoon the BBC men called again at Lord North Street. They feared that the Cheeseman episode could well have affected their relationship with the ex-Prime Minister. Sir Harold had told them earlier that he and Lady Wilson had watched the Cheeseman interview on TV, and the reporters had even handed him a small file containing material about Cheeseman.

From Press reports, Sir Harold might now think them totally incompetent, unable to check out the simplest facts: above all, that they were incapable of handling a "slow burner" in a discreet and long-term fashion.

In fact, when they discussed the affair with Sir Harold he did not seem in the least surprised.

"I did tell you Cheeseman would probably turn out to be a 'non-admitted person'," he said. "Nobody will admit he really exists."

In the months that followed, however, Cheeseman stayed in

contact with the reporters. He gave them more documents about his "military" background and made accurate predictions about political developments in Southern Africa. There were other reasons, too, why he appeared to be more than an imaginative hoaxer.

Cheeseman had told the reporters that in 1974 he had worked with Zambian intelligence agents in London. He claimed they had provided him with secret information and, by passing this to the South African Embassy, he had gained the confidence of BOSS agents working under diplomatic cover.

Cheeseman eventually agreed to accompany the reporters to the Zambian High Commission to check out his story. The High Commissioner, His Excellency L. H. Shamoya, confirmed that the people named in Cheeseman's documents had indeed worked at his mission. But he said he would not discuss any connection "Colonel" Cheeseman might have had with his Government in front of two journalists.

Courtiour and Penrose were shown into an adjoining room and then had an extraordinary stroke of good fortune. One of the double doors leading to the High Commissioner's office had not shut tight. Penrose eased the door open further and listened to the heated conversation taking place inside.

The High Commissioner asked Cheeseman why he had given the reporters the names of former members of his diplomatic staff. He was told that the journalists were in what he called a "controlled situation"; Cheeseman said he only fed them with information that was of benefit to the American intelligence agency he claimed he worked for. He spoke with confidence about Zambian military personnel who seemed equally familiar to the diplomat. Cheeseman stressed that it was important that British Intelligence should not be embarrassed by the cooperation which had, he said, existed between the Zambians and the Americans. The High Commissioner was equally concerned that his Government should not be embarrassed by any disclosures in the Press. He was in contact with Zambian Intelligence in Lusaka for guidance on what he should tell Courtiour and Penrose. In the meantime he urged "Colonel" Cheeseman to remain discreet. The men chatted for almost an hour and then invited the reporters back into the room. The High Commissioner promised he would make an official comment later.

The meeting at the High Commission did confirm Cheeseman's

claims that he had been in contact with Zambian diplomats in 1974. But in itself it did not help the reporters to discover for whom Cheeseman might have worked; it simply reinforced their belief that he was more than just a hoaxer.

But if Frederick Cheeseman was not an elaborate hoaxer, who was he really working for? British Intelligence? The CIA? Or one of the smaller American agencies like the Defence Intelligence Agency?

Perhaps "Colonel" Cheeseman had simply been employed by BOSS, or a South African multi-national company, to discredit the BBC? After all, the *Guardian* reporter Peter Hillmore tended to believe that André Thorne had been planted on his newspaper. He suspected that BOSS and the South African Embassy might well be behind what had happened.

For the moment Courtiour and Penrose felt a good deal more cautious as a result of their experience. There were going to be no easy answers to the enquiries they had undertaken. And they must be prepared to contend with things that might actually be fed to them as dis-information. They knew now that they must learn to assess and analyse what came to them in future, and perhaps to take the responsibility of deciding for themselves what its value was and what they should do with it.

## Chapter 7

When Penrose and Courtiour had arrived back at Broadcasting House after the Director-General's secret meeting with Harold Wilson, Sir Charles had immediately issued orders covering the practical arrangements for their investigation.

His first consideration had been how to reconcile the interests of what he knew to be rival branches of the BBC hierarchy: the separate departments of News and Current Affairs. He was therefore delighted when Courtiour was able to remind him that Penrose was from News, whereas he himself worked for Current Affairs, although, technically, Penrose and Courtiour were freelance journalists: for higher-paid personnel the freelance status carried significant tax advantages and indeed even one of the Corporation's top News Presenters, who to the ordinary viewer was the heart and soul of the BBC, also worked on a freelance contract.

However, Sir Charles did not have much time in which to settle things before he flew off to Yugoslavia that afternoon, so he asked his Chief Assistant, Peter Hardiman Scott, to make the arrangements. The whole set-up was to be accorded the status of a "Special Unit", with the secondment of a senior colleague, Gordon Carr, to act as resident coordinator.

As he left them, the Director-General asked the two reporters to keep him fully informed about developments and to keep a daily diary of events. If anything important cropped up while he was abroad they could communicate with Hardiman Scott. Confidentiality was of the greatest importance and they should have direct access to himself as well as maintaining their exclusive contact with Sir Harold.

With his particular flair for research, Courtiour decided to begin work for the BBC's new Special Unit by going back thoroughly over the published accounts of Norman Scott's recent allegations and the way these had affected Jeremy Thorpe.

When a file of clippings was handed to him by the BBC's central News Information Department, he was surprised to find how thick

it was. It contained articles not only from Britain and the Continent but also from America and even further afield.

Courtior was taken aback. He knew vaguely that the story had broken in the British Press in January of that year. But he was not conscious that Thorpe's struggle for political survival had been such a long drawn-out agony and had attracted so much publicity. What terrible pressure the man had endured! Fortunately the politician had survived his ordeal and still sat as an MP in the House of Commons.

Courtior had concentrated so fully on the Peter Hain "bank robbery" trial that the coinciding weeks of drama around Jeremy Thorpe had practically escaped his notice. He remembered briefly discussing the case with Hain while they filmed their documentary, but he had never had time to go into all the details. Both he and the Young Liberal leader had expressed sympathy for Thorpe's personal tragedy. Hain recognised that it contained parallels with his own plight, and at the very beginning he had stated publicly that although he was not Thorpe's political ally, the smear campaign against his Party's leader disgusted him.

Reading each article in sequence, Courtior slowly realised why the unfolding story had captured public interest everywhere. There was something for every taste: talk of high politics and high society; allegations of a homosexual relationship; the mysterious shooting of a dog on a lonely moor; a courtroom drama; a whiff of despicable blackmail; and a Prime Minister issuing dire warnings to the nation about South African spy plots.

He also realised something else: that by coming relatively fresh to the Thorpe-Scott part of the story which he and Penrose would be investigating, he was privileged to get a bird's eye view. People who read the individual newspaper articles as they appeared would have had to make do with isolated and sometimes distorted bits of information. He, on the other hand, was able to look at the varying accounts side by side and judge their combined effect.

The first item of news in the file of cuttings was not strictly anything to do with Norman Scott. It was about the collapse of a secondary bank called London and County in 1973. Mr Thorpe had joined the board of the company in 1971 as a non-executive director at a salary of £5,000 a year (which he received in addition to his salary as a Member of Parliament).

When the fringe bank collapsed the Government had ordered the Department of Trade to investigate. The Department's 259-

page report was made public on 29 January 1976, and contained a brief reference to the Liberal leader. It said that Mr Thorpe's role in the company did not lead to any depositors losing their money, but he had not paid enough attention to the affairs of the bank. "This venture in secondary banking", it concluded, "must remain a cautionary tale for any leading politician. For unless he is properly informed of the affairs of the company he joins, he cannot make his own judgment on the propriety of its transactions: and he is liable to be reminded, as Mr Thorpe must have been, that his reputation is not only his most marketable, but also his most valuable, commodity."

A report in the London *Daily Telegraph* on the following day, 30 January, commented: "As Mr Thorpe was cleared absolutely of any responsibility for the £50,700,000 collapse, his personal integrity is completely unscathed. But, although Liberal MPs rallied to his support in what was a difficult day for him, the general view at Westminster is that his political standing must have been dented, at least slightly and temporarily, by the report."

That reference to "a difficult day" for Mr Thorpe, Courtiour felt, was a classic example of British understatement. Because the next items in the file all concerned another happening on 29 January which was potentially much more damaging to the Liberal leader. Reporters from almost every British daily paper, and several foreign ones, had all, it seemed, chosen to attend a minor court hearing in Barnstaple, Devon, at which Norman Scott – who described himself on that occasion as an author – pleaded guilty to having obtained £58.40 by deception. The case itself would normally be regarded as insignificant but the reason for the keen attention paid by the Press was obvious. In the course of his brief appearance, Scott had made the sensational allegation that he was being hounded "because of his homosexual relationship with Jeremy Thorpe". "It has been 15 years," he added, "and I would really like to start to get this matter cleared up".

The headlines that followed were predictable. Court proceedings in England can be reported freely in the columns of any newspaper without the attendant risk of libel action.

From covering court proceedings in the past, the reporter was aware that well-known personalities were particularly vulnerable in cases where cranks and liars spun fantastic yarns to divert attention from their own crimes. Accused persons were liable to allege all manner of relationships with prominent public figures,

including imaginary sexual escapades, whether with a member of the opposite sex or of their own. However, reporters and editors, sometimes nudged by sensible judges, usually tried to guard against the possible abuse of court privilege.

At Westminster that same day, the Liberal leader, after consulting his legal advisers Goodman Derrick, had issued a brief signed statement. "It is well over twelve years," he said, "since I last saw or spoke to Mr Scott. There is no truth in Mr Scott's wild allegations." But Courtiour noticed that the politician's short, dignified denial had not been given anything like the prominence of Norman Scott's original outburst. The sensation-mongers, not to mince words, had had a field day.

The reporter continued reading his way through the file of clippings. He noticed that once Scott had made his "wild allegations", as Thorpe had described them on the day of the court case, the story had by no means died down. Scott had continued making his claims outside the court in the days that followed, embellishing his original statement with further bizarre tales: while in the search for confirmation or denial, newsmen it seemed had approached everyone who had any personal connection with Jeremy Thorpe: relatives, old friends and fellow Members of Parliament.

They had even spoken to Mrs Ursula Thorpe, the politician's 73-year-old mother, who had given them short shrift. "This story of my son's so-called sexual relationship with this man is a pack of lies," she was quoted as saying.

Norman Scott's former wife, Sue Myers, was reported by the *Observer* as commenting that the allegations of a relationship between her ex-husband and Thorpe were "an extraordinary story".

"It is ludicrous and grossly unfair that he can say these things," she continued, adding that during her two-year marriage to Scott he had sought psychiatric help.

In a lengthy article by Ron Mount, the *News of the World* seemed to take up this point of the former Mrs Scott. The article was entitled: "Inside the strange mind of Norman Scott", and it said: "I have just come away from a strange, disturbing interview with Norman Scott, the man who is trying to ruin Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe, and I am bound to say that Scott strikes me as living in a world of almost complete fantasy. He is a man who clearly needs help. And it is pathetic to see the way he is wallowing in his sudden notoriety."



The *News of the World* reporter described how he had met Scott in a hotel in Weymouth. He said he found him "holding court", and that "he was granting interviews like Royalty".

Ron Mount had told the ex-model that he was widely regarded as a drunken psychotic blackmailer. And Scott was reported as replying: "I'm very hurt that anyone should say such a thing."

The reporter described Scott's appearance: "He was wearing a shabby blue safari suit over a seaman's jersey. Round his neck was a gold chain. He smoked incessantly. He absorbed a great deal of whisky – only Bell's would do. He looked a wreck." Then, according to the article, Mount had told Scott that he wanted to find out what sort of man he was. He said Scott answered at once: "Put me down as a mess . . . that's what I am."

When Mount asked how the Press had known in advance about his appearance in Barnstaple court on 29 January, Scott replied: "It wasn't me who tipped off the Press and TV about the case. I thought it would all go off quietly. It wasn't my intention to cause a major scandal."

Courtiour snorted aloud as he read this last reply. There was a bare-faced quality about it. All those busy and highly paid reporters had not just happened to be in Devon for their winter holidays. They had been told in advance what was about to happen, and had come there specially to hear it.

The picture of Scott which emerged from the newspaper clipping was of a rather whisky-sodden romancer, a vindictive man who cared little about what he said or to whom he said it. Clearly he possessed a richly imaginative mind.

In contrast, apart from his brief statement to the Press on 29 January, Jeremy Thorpe had not commented further on Norman Scott's allegations. He had continued running his Party's affairs at Westminster and devoting the remainder of his time to his constituency in North Devon. Any spare time at his disposal seemed, from the clippings, to have been spent with his wife and young son Rupert.

Marion Thorpe, the Countess of Harewood by her first marriage, had been treated with lugubrious sympathy by some sections of the Press. Her husband's unexpected ordeal had obviously affected her life as well as his. On 5 February, in the first week of her family's sudden and unwelcome publicity, she was quoted by the *Daily Express* as saying to a friend: "I don't want your sympathy."

The *Express* reporter who had tried to interview her at the Thorpes' ten-bedroom home in West London wrote that she looked exhausted by the Scott episode: a nightmare which had interrupted her family's life.

Two days later the same newspaper wrote about the support Jeremy Thorpe was receiving in his political constituency of North Devon. Beneath the headline, "Cheers all the way as Thorpe goes home", Courtiour went on to read: "Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe was given a rousing reception in his North Devon constituency last night. He told supporters in a tiny village hall: 'There is no community I am more willing to be judged by than my fellow North Devonians.'

'I want to thank you for the confidence you have shown in me, which, if I may venture to say so, I believe I still deserve . . .

'I only have one regret tonight. That is, we only have one representative from Fleet Street present. I only wish we had the whole of Fleet Street here.'"

The *Express* article ended: "Mr Thorpe said he and his wife had been heartened by the messages of sympathy and support they had received from all over the country."

Courtiour thought to himself that it seemed ironic that only one reporter had turned up to hear the Liberal leader and yet countless reporters were pursuing Norman Scott on exactly the same day.

That same day, Courtiour noted, Jeremy Thorpe also received renewed backing from his colleagues in Parliament. In the *Daily Telegraph* on 5 February David Harris wrote: "Mr Thorpe is staying on as leader of the Liberal party, for the time being at least. His twelve fellow Liberal MPs reaffirmed their support for 'his continued leadership' at a meeting in the Commons last night. During the two-and-a-half-hour meeting the MPs discussed fully with Mr Thorpe the allegation that he had been involved in a homosexual relationship years ago . . .

"Mr Thorpe assured his colleagues that there was no truth in the allegation and the MPs accepted his assurance."

On 5 February, the Young Liberal Council, too, gave its full support to Mr Thorpe in resisting "slurs and innuendoes". And some newsmen began to agree that the Liberal leader had been subjected to a despicable smear campaign.

Courtiour went on reading the clippings, puzzling about why Scott had aroused so much interest amongst the media. Could the former Prime Minister be right in believing that Jeremy Thorpe's

ordeal had been skilfully orchestrated by people wishing to damage the Liberals politically? After all, why should a man convicted of petty fraud, someone as unattractive as Scott had been painted, have warranted so much serious concern in the first place?

Putting his file down for a moment, he considered the unusual impact of Scott's isolated outburst. It certainly seemed that reporters had been tipped off in advance: they were primed to anticipate the spectacle of another British scandal involving politics and sex.

But it was not only the British Press which had pursued the Scott story. Courtiour had also seen back numbers of several South African papers. How had they treated and reacted to the Liberal leader's difficulties?

An Afrikaaner newspaper, *Die Burger*, said in an editorial: "Whatever the truth, no good South African would have cause to wish Jeremy Thorpe well."

Here, thought Courtiour, was an indication of how bitterly unpopular Thorpe was in South Africa. But Sir Harold surely was not just referring to newspaper criticism from that quarter? Had more sinister forces from South Africa promoted Norman Scott's allegations and stoked up the fire? By now there were enough other innuendoes and scare stories from Scott's unsavoury past to fill a dozen files at BOSS headquarters. There was even a trail which led to a runaway British MP, Peter Bessell, who was living in obscurity in California.

Then, after reading about half-way through the file of cuttings, Courtiour saw that the Liberal leader had suddenly decided to comment further about the Scott affair. Apart from his terse, blunt statement on 29 January, he had not referred directly to the story that threatened to sully his name and that of his party.

But on Sunday 14 March he had chosen to speak out exclusively in the columns of the *Sunday Times*, and this second statement was much longer and more detailed than his previous one. Courtiour read through it carefully. Its message was unequivocal: Norman Scott was a vindictive liar, a man who had come to the Liberal MP for help and had then turned against him. Moreover, Scott was said to have made accusations "of a similar nature" against other public figures.

In particular, Courtiour saw that Mr Thorpe was able to lean very heavily on the point that some of his senior colleagues in the

Liberal Party had investigated Scott's claims already, and that they had done this with police assistance. "My colleagues," said Mr Thorpe, "regarded the allegations as pure moonshine." If this point could be substantiated it was surely the strongest possible indication that Norman Scott had been telling lies. Mr Thorpe's fellow Liberals were widely regarded as men of honour and their findings must have been exactly as he said, otherwise presumably they would long since have forced him to resign.

The main task now, as far as Courtiour could see, was for Penrose and himself to discover the true motivation for Scott's scurrilous attack on the Liberal leader. The newspapers had generally made out that the man was a crank, but was that the whole picture? What about his political background, and particularly about those ties with South Africa which Sir Harold Wilson had been at pains to stress?

Meanwhile, there was "the incident of the shot dog", to which Mr Thorpe referred in his statement. So Courtiour skimmed quickly through the rest of the clippings to remind himself about this peculiar happening.

A pilot called Andrew Newton had shot Scott's dog on a lonely moor in Devon in October 1975. His trial had taken place at Exeter five months later and the Press, it was clear from the clippings, had covered it in considerable detail. Scott had again taken the opportunity of repeating his allegations against Jeremy Thorpe in the privilege of a courtroom.

The accused pilot explained to the jury how Scott had been blackmailing him over a nude photograph which he had unwisely allowed to fall into the former model's hands. Scott had threatened to send it to the pilot's employers, and it was this apparent provocation that had driven him to shoot the dog as a kind of warning to Scott to leave him in peace.

There seemed little doubt from the newspaper reports that the judge had accepted the submission that Norman Scott was a blackmailer. But he was obliged to tick Newton off. "As a matter of law," he had said, "you are not allowed to shoot blackmailers. If people were allowed to take the law into their own hands you see what the result could be. Chaos." He had therefore sentenced Newton to two years' imprisonment.

Putting the clippings file back into his briefcase, Courtiour realised how complicated this whole area of their investigation was going to be. As a matter of course, he and Penrose would have to

confirm all the points in Jeremy Thorpe's statement of 14 March. And at some stage he and Penrose would no doubt be meeting Norman Scott and evaluating his claims for themselves. But how could one trust the word of a man like that?

## Chapter 8

It was on 20 May, the day after their fourth secret meeting with Sir Harold Wilson, and after they had already followed up a number of the other leads he had given them, that Penrose and Courtiour first came face to face with Norman Scott. For convenience, they had arranged to meet him in the Travellers Bar at the Grosvenor Hotel, near to London's Victoria Station.

As he sat at the bar, the thin, six-foot-tall model looked older than his 36 years. His face was lined and the corners of his mouth were turned down. Penrose thought fleetingly that he bore a striking facial resemblance to Jeremy Thorpe, but dismissed this idea as merely auto-suggestion. But Scott certainly looked different from the days when glossy debonair photographs of him had appeared in *Vogue* and other international magazines.

Now he looked more like someone suffering from shock after a minor traffic accident than a top fashion model. In the dry summer heat, he sat there shivering and complaining that he felt cold.

Scott's blue eyes flickered from one corner of the bar to another like searchlights out of control. If there was a sudden noise he would react nervously, often jumping almost to his feet. But he seemed quite conscious of his own state of mind. It was natural, he claimed, because he was frightened.

"So many scary things have happened to me in recent months," he kept on saying. "I think people may want to kill me: I believe I'm constantly watched."

Scott spoke haltingly at times, in a whispering, effete way. But occasionally his voice deepened and he became self-assured and defiant.

"Journalists are always asking me questions but hardly anything of what I tell them ever gets into print," he said angrily, staring accusingly at the two reporters. "I have documents and letters to prove so much of what I have told the Press."

He gave the impression of a complex personality: a composite character built out of sharply contradictory and disturbing elements. He apologised for being practically incoherent, blaming the

drugs he had been prescribed and the alcohol he drank every day. But in fact he was both articulate and rational for long periods of the conversation.

Norman Scott had continued to tell his version of what had happened in the past, even after he had been ridiculed and people had been told not to believe a word of what he said. Moreover, events which he said had begun in 1960 were still continuing to oppress him sixteen years later.

Penrose thought how bizarre it was that the former British Prime Minister should have urged them to get in contact with a figure like this. But he had said there were letters which Scott's lawyer had written to the model which spoke about a visit to South Africa and his being paid large sums of money. Sir Harold had suggested they should endeavour to get hold of copies of those letters, although that might not prove easy.

Was Sir Harold right? Did such letters exist? Indeed was Norman Scott a blackmailer and a South African agent as the former Premier was strongly suggesting?

Whatever the truth of such highly placed suspicions, the two reporters were both sceptical and wary of the man sitting in front of them. At the very beginning of their investigation Sir Charles Curran had warned them to work as a team. Having two witnesses to a conversation gave them and the BBC a certain protection in tricky situations where corroboration might be invaluable. Scott might well prove to be a difficult, if not dangerous, person to tackle in their enquiry.

Penrose and Courtiour had also agreed that the *Tonight* researcher should be responsible for keeping records and for filing all documents which came to them. At the BBC he had a reputation for being a careful worker when it came to collecting vital papers.

It was Courtiour therefore who gently turned the conversation back to the files which Scott claimed he kept in a black attaché case. He wanted to begin negotiations to examine, perhaps even photocopy, some of the letters he had heard about. There was no doubt in his mind that getting hold of this sensitive material would be a drawn-out complicated procedure.

"For heaven's sake," said Scott immediately, "take anything away and photostat it if you wish." And without further ado, he pushed four sets of files across the table.

Courtior could hardly believe his senses; he was delighted at

this apparently lucky break. Did this mean he could have Scott's files for nothing; for no fee and with no conditions attached? But the reporter kept his thoughts to himself.

His colleague sitting on his left was alarmed by the comparative ease with which they were being offered confidential letters and other documents. He asked Scott why he was handing over files, some of them containing original papers, to two complete strangers.

At this Courtior made a fuss of taking out his cigarettes and offering one to Scott, meanwhile kicking Penrose quietly on the leg. Why did he have to raise problems where none, it seemed, existed?

Penrose felt the message and told Scott briskly that they would write out a proper receipt for the files he was handing to them. Scott replied that it was unnecessary, but the two reporters insisted that it was protection for both parties.

Then Penrose watched with mixed feelings as Scott began fingering eagerly through his files and recounting to Courtior why he thought one letter or another particularly important. This man would be any politician's nightmare, he reflected. Not only did he publicly claim a sexual relationship with a man in high public office, but he also distributed confidential papers quite indiscriminately, it seemed, to anybody who asked for them.

What did Scott have to gain from handing out information so freely? Why was he cooperating with them so readily? Even though he claimed that he had never accepted a penny piece from any newsman it was still very suspicious.

Here he sat, ordering more drinks and going on talking about this and that. Where did the money come from to buy gin and tonics if other journalists had not already laced his pockets? He must be flush with the riches of his notoriety: there was no other explanation. Or was there, and did it have anything to do with payments from South Africa?

Penrose tried to move the conversation on to this central issue. He asked Scott whether there were letters in his file which mentioned, he hesitated for a moment, "South Africa".

Pointing at the files on Courtior's lap, Scott answered that "everything" was inside.

And did Scott still contend that he had formed a relationship in the past with the former Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe? A homosexual relationship?

"Of course I do," replied Scott, obviously tired of being asked the same question by a stream of newsmen in recent weeks. "This afternoon," he said, "I'm going to Scotland Yard to get back letters Jeremy sent me in 1961 and 1962." He also referred to a postcard, but the two reporters concentrated on the letters.

"The letters are love letters from Thorpe to me," he stated plainly, making no secret of the fact that he was a homosexual.

Courtiour explained that they were not, frankly, interested – and neither were the BBC – in the homosexual aspects of his allegations. Their main concern was the political implications and ramifications of the matter.

Scott suddenly began speaking in a whisper, claiming that two men had been watching him closely from a far corner of the room.

Courtiour hugged the files as if X-ray eyes might be trying to penetrate their anonymous covers. Penrose felt slightly ridiculous, acting in this panicky way, but Scott's anxiety was infectious. The reporter's instincts told him that it might just be Scott's inner fears that were making him talk so readily.

A few minutes before, Scott had mentioned his short-lived marriage and how it had ended in divorce. He had also spoken bitterly about the fact that he was cut off from seeing his six-year-old son Benjamin. This was another element in the former model's make-up. The point that he had been married and had a son was not something which had drawn much attention during the recent publicity. He could presumably have used it to defend himself against some of the insinuations that he was "not normal", but he was clearly not prepared to be hypocritical about his homosexuality.

On the other hand, Scott undoubtedly had less to lose than the politician about whom he had made his statements. Until July 1967, when a new Sexual Offences Act was passed which altered the law in England and Wales to permit homosexual relationships between consenting adults over the age of 21, homosexual behaviour had been a serious criminal offence. If Jeremy Thorpe had committed homosexual acts with Scott in the early 1960s, the MP had broken the law. Even now, although the law had been modified, public attitudes had not changed completely. There was still a section of public opinion which lagged behind the legislators who had steered the new laws through Parliament.

Back in 1954 the Government had set up the Wolfenden Committee to consider the law and practice relating to homosexual

offences and prostitution. The debate had then shifted to Westminster and during highly charged sessions in the Commons and the Lords from 1960 to 1967, MPs and peers had gingerly discussed what Oscar Wilde's close friend Lord Alfred Douglas had called "the Love that dare not speak its name".

Before the new Sexual Offences Act, homosexuals in Britain undoubtedly suffered at the hands of blackmailers and others who found satisfaction in persecuting them. Often they faced public humiliation as well as imprisonment if they were exposed, so they could be forced to pay money or to do whatever was required of them by anyone who chose to exploit their position.

In the early 1960s – the very period to which Scott's allegations referred – Britain had suffered a series of colourful sex scandals. In one of them John Vassall, an Admiralty clerk and formerly a clerk at the British Embassy in Moscow, had been found guilty of spying for the Russians from 1955 until his arrest in 1962. Vassall claimed in defence that he was a homosexual and had been blackmailed by the KGB into giving away secrets.

As Norman Scott talked on about a relationship that had taken place prior to 1967, Penrose and Courtiour knew that they might be entering this same area of blackmail, spying and counterspying. Scott could have been blackmailed into making false allegations about Jeremy Thorpe.

The two reporters began to suspect they were seeing the tip of an enormous iceberg.

## Chapter 9

Penrose and Courtiour obviously had to examine Norman Scott's allegations in greater detail. The reporters wanted to know if there was anything in his claims and why he should persist so vehemently in making them. If they were not true, was he simply a paid puppet with someone behind the scenes pulling the strings to embarrass Thorpe and the Liberal party? This was the kind of link with South African or other foreign Secret Services that they could expect to find if the ideas that Sir Harold Wilson had implanted were correct.

According to Jeremy Thorpe's second Press statement, published in the *Sunday Times*, on 14 March 1976, he had first been approached by Scott fifteen years before. However, he repeated publicly that he had not seen Scott for twelve years and that the allegations against him were baseless. So either the two men had known each other over a period of three years, or possibly they had only seen each other on isolated occasions three years apart. Mr Thorpe's statement seemed to imply the latter.

Mr Thorpe also complained bitterly – perhaps not unnaturally in the circumstances – that “the whole of this tissue of elaborately woven mendacity and malice is based on no more than the fact that I had met Scott in November, 1961, when he called at the House of Commons and sent in a card, the normal approach to an MP, mentioning the name of a man whom I held in high esteem”.

An obvious question to ask then was who was this “man held in high esteem”, since presumably he could substantiate Mr Thorpe's version of the perfectly proper way in which he had come to meet Scott.

The *Sunday Times* “Insight” team identified the man as “a rich, young Scandinavian called Brecht van de Vater”. “Insight” went on to say that Norman Scott, under his former name of Josiffe, had worked as a stable boy at van de Vater's property in Oxfordshire.

Courtior pointed out to his colleague that this tied in with something in the file of papers which Scott had passed over to them at the Grosvenor Hotel. There was a letter in that file on

House of Commons paper which mentioned a Mr “Van de Breck de Vater”. It was dated 12 May 1971, addressed to a Mr A. W. K. Rose, and was signed by Tom Dale, Personal Assistant to the Rt Hon Jeremy Thorpe. It said:

Dear Mr Rose,

Mr Thorpe has asked me to acknowledge your letter of May 4th.

As far as he is aware, he does not know Mr Norman Scott. However, he believes that Mr Van de Breck de Vater knew a Mr Norman Josiffe who may be the same person.

Mr Thorpe asks me to say that he is under no obligation to this gentleman.

Penrose thought there was every likelihood that “Van de Breck de Vater” and “Brecht van de Vater” were one and the same “rich, young Scandinavian”. Surely he would be a good person with whom to start checking Mr Thorpe's explanation of events, if they were able to find him.

So Penrose made a series of preliminary calls in an attempt to trace Brecht van de Vater. He immediately found several people in showjumping circles around Oxfordshire who remembered a man called Norman Van de Vater: perhaps again he was the same person?

Meanwhile Courtiour called the nearest police station to Van de Vater's old home at Kingham and was referred to a Mr Robert Slatter of Manor Farm in Kingham who had lived there for many years and might be of help. When Courtiour rang Mr Slatter, the farmer confirmed that he had known the man they were seeking but said that the best person to talk to would be Ryan, one of his stable lads who had once actually worked for Van de Vater.

A few days later Courtiour drove to Manor Farm. John Ryan, a well-built man in his thirties, spoke slowly and thoughtfully, not only about Norman Van de Vater and Norman Scott, but also about Jeremy Thorpe. The place where Van de Vater had lived was called Squirrel Cottage; it incorporated a flat which was where Norman Scott had lived in 1960. Ryan himself had only worked there as a stable lad for a very short time, and had left just before the arrival of Scott.

Mr Van de Vater often had guests at the cottage and Jeremy Thorpe had once stayed there for a period.



Courtiour then spoke to other people in the Kingham area who remembered "Norman Josiffe", as he then was. Several of them remarked – in an area where horses are important – that Norman was a "very fine rider". But few villagers around Kingham thought that Van de Vater was rich, Scandinavian, or the owner of any property in Oxfordshire: the description used by the *Sunday Times*.

In fact, few held him in the "high esteem" in which he was held by the Liberal leader. One local horsewoman mentioned that Van de Vater had been declared bankrupt in 1960.

The two reporters contacted the well-known showjumping trainer Fred Hartill and his wife. Hartill, the owner of the celebrated international horse Pennwood Forge Mill, had employed Scott at their stables shortly after he left Van de Vater. Van de Vater, they said, had wished to purchase a horse and claimed that his father was a sea captain who would pay for it when he returned from sea.

Courtiour eventually found "The Hon Van de Vater" listed in the Irish Telephone Directory for 1974. In the *Horse and Hound* magazine he was mentioned as the Master of Foxhounds for the United Kennels in County Cork.

When Penrose finally got through to Van de Vater he was at first willing to talk about his former employee Norman Scott.

"The man was an absolute scoundrel and a horse thief," he said in a high-pitched voice. "Of course I employed him, but not for very long. I sacked him."

He then began explaining his own feelings about the allegations surrounding Jeremy Thorpe. Scott was a wretch, he said, and it was a disgrace that the Press had pursued his friend in the way they did. And now the BBC were following suit and hounding him too.

"If you misquote me or indeed quote me at all I shall hang you from an oak tree," he told Penrose.

The reporter said he was only making a few enquiries: background research into a larger story about South Africa and political interference. Van de Vater stressed that he knew nothing about South Africa.

Van de Vater said his lawyers would complain to the BBC immediately that he was being harassed. In fact, he would mention the matter to Jeremy Thorpe in London; he had other things on his mind. Van de Vater was in the Irish equestrian team, and had been entered in the Montreal Olympics on a horse called Blue

Tom Tit, where he would be competing against, amongst others, Captain Mark Phillips in the three-day event. In the past, indeed, he had been an official party guest of Princess Anne and her husband.

In the meantime the reporter had learned that Normand Vivian Dudley Van de Brecht de Vater, as he had been known, had been born Norman Vivian Vater, the son of a South Wales coal face worker.

Courtiour found the Van de Vater story amusing, but wondered whether Van de Vater would turn out to be of significance to the wider story they were investigating. Penrose disagreed with him over this point, since Van de Vater seemed an odd person for the former Liberal leader to "hold in high esteem".

Jeremy Thorpe had undoubtedly been close to Norman Van de Vater, and had been best man at his wedding in 1961.

At the very least, this small part of the reporters' investigation had been worthwhile because it had shown up various inaccuracies in the reports published in the *Sunday Times*. And this in itself was significant since, if the stories and statements could be wrong in one respect, then they could be wrong in others.

Courtiour in fact saw nothing wrong with this last conclusion. He pressed on with another lead mentioned in the *Sunday Times* article on 14 March 1976. Scott was reported as saying that so great was his bitterness against Thorpe in 1965 that he had been arrested while trying to take a gun into the House of Commons to kill him.

Jeremy Thorpe told the *Sunday Times* that he subsequently raised the incident of the gun with the Commissioner of Police and had been assured that there had been no record of any such arrest as Scott had claimed had taken place.

When Norman Scott was tackled about these allegations he replied:

"I wanted to kill him three years earlier," he said openly, "in 1962. I found a bullet but had no gun to fire it with."

Scott pulled out a statement he had made to the police on 19 December 1962, which contained a series of truly extraordinary allegations.

The six-page statement, nearly three thousand words long, was written under the heading "Metropolitan Police" and the address "Chelsea Police Station, 'B' Division".

Norman Scott's name at the time was given in full: "Norman Nicholas Lianche-Josiffe, age 22; born 12.2.1940, of Worthey

Manor, Porlock Weir, Somerset." And his occupation as a "horse trainer".

The statement began somewhat dramatically: "I have come to [the] police to tell you about my homosexual relations with Jeremy Thorpe, who is a Liberal MP, because these relations have caused me so much purgatory and I am afraid it might happen to someone else."

The statement alleged that Scott had been invited in 1960 to Stonewalls at Limsfield near Oxted in Surrey, where Jeremy Thorpe lived with his mother. Mrs Thorpe understood that Norman Josiffe was going abroad with him the next day. That night, Scott alleged, his close and affectionate relationship with the Liberal leader had begun. The statement described in detail his allegations of homosexual acts in the months that followed.

It was, of course, significant that according to Scott the first meeting had taken place in 1960. This was a year earlier than Jeremy Thorpe had given for his first meeting with the young stable lad, when Scott had been under the age of 21. In other words, Norman Scott was not only admitting he had taken part in homosexual activities which at that time were an offence, but was also accusing the MP for North Devon of having illegal relations with a minor. However, the relationship described by Scott Mr Thorpe has consistently and strenuously denied ever included any homosexual activity.

According to Scott, Jeremy Thorpe subsequently introduced him to friends of his in Somerset: the Colliers. He had stayed at their house, helped Jimmy Collier with his canvassing for the Liberal Association and spent Christmas with them. Later he had joined the Liberal leader and his mother and they had stayed together at the Broom Hill Hotel near Barnstaple.

The statement went on to describe how the friendship had allegedly developed, and to claim that Thorpe gave Scott money to rent a room at 21 Draycott Place in Chelsea. He visited the younger man regularly until Scott claimed he went to see Thorpe at the House of Commons.

"I told him I wanted to stop our relationship," Scott claimed later, "and I said I thought it would be better if we didn't see each other again." Scott alleged that the politician absolutely refused even to consider it.

The penultimate paragraph on page five of Scott's statement to the police read: "He [Thorpe] said that he couldn't be hurt, and

that I could not harm him or his character if I told the police or anyone, because, he said, MPs have some sort of privilege, and he said he was a friend of the Director of Public Prosecutions."

Scott finished by stating that he had received a number of letters from Thorpe. He said "he sent me a letter which I have given you". "I can produce another letter which Jeremy sent me, written on 12.3.61."

The statement had been taken down and witnessed by Detective-Sergeant Edward Smith, in the presence of Detective-Inspector Robert Huntley of "B" Division.

Oddly enough this was the same Robert Huntley, later Commander at Scotland Yard, who was now Head of Security at the BBC.

Penrose telephoned Huntley and he confirmed, hesitatingly at first, that he had taken down Norman Scott's statement in 1962.

"There were a lot of queer things going on in Chelsea, Barrie," he said, laughingly. "You never quite knew what to believe."

Ex-Commander Huntley said that he and Detective-Sergeant Smith had suddenly been taken off the case and they had not interviewed Jeremy Thorpe about the allegations which Scott had made against the MP. Frankly, said Robert Huntley, he did not know if any other police officers had questioned the Member for North Devon about the matter, though it was normal police practice at the time to take such enquiries seriously where allegations about a minor were involved.

One question that seemed relevant to Penrose and Courtiour was whether Scott had actually gone to the police of his own accord in order to make his allegations. Had he deliberately marched into the police station in a malicious attempt to ruin the Liberal MP? Or had he in fact been arrested? The answer appeared to be neither: what appeared to have happened was that the daughter of a former Editor of the *Times* newspaper, Caroline Barrington-Ward, had contacted the police about Norman Scott on 18 December after he had confided in her that he felt so bitter about Jeremy Thorpe, a friend of hers, that he had decided to shoot him.

When Penrose spoke with Caroline Barrington-Ward, she warned him not to take Scott's word seriously. In her view he had played a dastardly role in the Press campaign "against Jeremy Thorpe". But "I did what any public-spirited citizen would do in the circumstances," she confirmed, "I called in the police."

It was the police who had then gone in search of Scott and he had agreed to go round to Chelsea Police Station and make a statement.

## Chapter 10

Allegations of blackmail were, however, a warning note that had been sounded regularly in connection with the Norman Scott affair. During Penrose and Courtiour's first visit to Lord North Street, Sir Harold Wilson had stated bluntly, and in anger, that "Norman Scott was nothing but a common blackmailer". And his view had inevitably had an influence on their initial researches.

As Prime Minister in the early months of 1976, Harold Wilson – whose Ministerial office automatically made him the overlord of Britain's Secret Intelligence Services – had access in theory to a vast amount of classified material. Perhaps his unequivocal denunciation of Scott was based not only upon what had already been said in the courts and in the Press but on confidential information supplied to him by his Security chiefs?

However, it was not only Sir Harold and Jeremy Thorpe who had spoken of Scott as a blackmailer. Blackmail had also been mentioned during the trial of Andrew Newton in March of that year when Newton had alleged that he paid Scott £4 a month because the model possessed a nude photograph of him, which he had threatened to show to his employers. In support of this allegation, Newton's defence counsel had suggested that Scott's behaviour in the past showed strongly that he was a blackmailer: that the model had obtained £2,500 by blackmail when documents he possessed had been sold to a mysterious third party, and more money from Peter Bessell by blackmail.

The barrister explained to the jury that Peter Bessell was "reputed" to have given Scott what he called "silence money" because Scott knew that Bessell was having an affair with a young woman.

This suggestion that Scott had blackmailed the former MP for Bodmin was no doubt influenced by a letter which Bessell had written shortly before to a lawyer in Barnstaple called Michael Barnes, who was Jeremy Thorpe's Devon solicitor.

In the letter, dated 20 January 1976, Bessell explained that in 1965 he had been asked by a Parliamentary colleague, whom he

did not name, to see Norman Scott and help him with a problem he had over obtaining a new National Insurance card. Bessell claimed that in an effort to help Scott he had given him money and odd jobs to do. But when he had finally told the model that there would be no more money and no further work, Scott was said to have applied a form of blackmail:

"He threatened to expose the fact that I was having a relationship with my private secretary. Naturally an exposure of this kind would have been distressing to my wife and children and damaging to my political career."

Bessell said that he would be "happy to provide a sworn affidavit as to the facts set out in this letter". In addition he said he recognised his duty in the matter and "you are at liberty to show this letter, in confidence, to any responsible person it may concern".

Although Bessell had made clear that he wished for no publicity, the contents of the letter were in fact shown by Jeremy Thorpe to Cyril Smith, MP, the Liberal Chief Whip. Cyril Smith then told Press men that he had heard about an "affidavit" which accused Scott of blackmail.

Alarmed and angered by this unexpected publicity, Bessell wrote to the solicitors withdrawing the letter. In a statement to the Press on 3 February 1976 he issued a detailed denial. "The payments were not made in connection with any blackmail attempt," he said. "It seemed peanuts at the time. But the idea that I paid Scott to keep quiet is rubbish, absolute rubbish. It was purely an act of charity."

When Bessell withdrew the letter, however, he was unable also to withdraw the suspicion which had been planted. Scott had been accused in the most public way of blackmail and such was his treatment in the Press that when Newton finally came to court, for many people it was virtually Scott rather than Newton who was on trial.

By the time Courtiour and Penrose came to examine these events, they felt that they could only resolve the conflict between the various stories told by Peter Bessell by talking to the man directly. Among other things, they were puzzled at how he came to write such a damning letter in the first place if its contents were totally untrue. After their own experience with Frederick Cheeseman, they were determined to examine rather carefully a situation in which, yet again, a statement had first been made and then

withdrawn. They therefore spoke to a colleague at the BBC, Tom Mangold, who already knew Bessell and had visited him at his home in California.

When the Special Unit was set up by the Director-General, Mangold had passed to Penrose letters that Scott, Thorpe and Bessell had written in the past. He now called Bessell and asked him to be frank with Penrose and Courtiour about the Liberal Party story.

Penrose waited up late one night to call Peter Bessell in California. The former MP seemed serious, alert and eager to talk about his role in the Scott saga, both as a friend of Jeremy Thorpe and as a politician. He admitted immediately that he had been morally wrong to write the letter to Thorpe's lawyer in January, and confirmed his later withdrawal of it. He said that Scott was not a blackmailer in his experience and he would send Penrose a memorandum on the subject at once.

From that time on and throughout all the months of Penrose and Courtiour's investigation, there followed a series of lengthy trans-Atlantic calls with Bessell and a string of detailed letters about his role in the affair. The former MP agreed that he might be regarded as a "discredited witness" because of the untruthful letter he had written to Barnes earlier that year, but he gave the impression of wanting to set the matter straight once and for all. Many months later, he also deposited a long confessional account with his London solicitors, which went into explicit detail about his years as a go-between in the affair of Norman Scott and Jeremy Thorpe. It contained most of the points which by that time he had already recounted to Penrose and Courtiour.

The two reporters already had in their possession copies of the so-called "retainer" letters – many of them written on House of Commons notepaper – which had accompanied the small sums of money that Bessell had sent to Scott in the late 1960s under his original name of Josiffe. So they were able to see for themselves what Scott and Bessell were talking about. There were over thirty of these letters, the first of which was dated 2 August 1967:

41 Pall Mall,  
London, S.W.1.  
2/8/67

Dear Mr Josiffe,

In accordance with our agreement, I enclose £5 retainer for the week ending August 8th.

Yours sincerely,  
Peter Bessell.

The letters were fairly standard and as time passed were signed by secretaries rather than by Bessell himself. Another typical one was:

From: Peter Bessell MP,  
House of Commons,  
London, S.W.1.  
14th February, 1968.

Dear Mr Josiffe,

Mr Bessell has asked me to send you the enclosed £7 as your retainer for the current week.

Yours sincerely,  
S. M. Skelton,  
Private Secretary.

Penrose and Courtiour pondered over the significance of the word "retainer". There was nothing to suggest that Scott was performing any services to earn the money that was being sent to him. If Scott was doing odd jobs around Bessell's office in Pall Mall, he could have been handed any payment on the spot without the need for it to be posted to him. But neither, from the open way in which Bessell allowed a string of secretaries to handle the matter, was there any sign that it embarrassed him personally to be making the payments. Friendly greetings like "All good wishes" would also seem out of place if Bessell were writing to a man who was actually blackmailing him.

The payments seemed to be made on a weekly basis, with frequent references to "your retainer for this week". At first the sum was £5 but later this rose to £7 and sometimes £10 on isolated occasions, but once the amount was as little as £1. The payments continued, not always weekly, over a sixteen-month period in 1967 to 1968, consistent with Bessell's guess that he had paid Scott only

between £300 and £400 over the whole period covered by the retainers.

In May of 1968 it was agreed that Bessell would assist Scott to set up as a model but there was disagreement between the two as to how much money it would take to launch him on such a career in London. In response to a request from Scott for £200 Bessell wrote early in May:

Many thanks for your letter and for giving me the details of your requirements.

I certainly think that these must be cut down substantially.

1. I do not understand why you need £28 for photographer's fees. Surely this should be covered by the Agency. The same applies for the composite printing.

2. 15 guineas for the model book seems reasonable and I would be glad to let you have this.

3. £40 for clothes. I am sure you can reduce this figure if you try.

4. £15 for bag. I think this is excessive as you can buy very good suitcases cheaply at Marks and Spencers.

In a further letter in mid-May, Bessell wrote "I think it is up to you - £75 to get started now in London with no further commitment for twelve months. If you do not succeed then we can talk about the Bahamas again."

All these letters were curious but the open way in which Scott was paid the rather small amounts and the way in which it was made clear that the £75 was to last for twelve months tended to discount thoughts of blackmail.

Scott's explanation for the payments that he had received was, he claimed, that Jeremy Thorpe had been his *employer* during the course of their affair. Thorpe, he said, had promised to take care of him and told him he should not worry about finance and that kind of problem.

Scott took Thorpe at his word, handed over his National Insurance card and stopped worrying about such things. Thorpe then paid some of his young friend's National Insurance contributions, thus placing himself on official records as the employer of Norman Scott.

It is the duty of an employer to ensure that his employee's contributions to the State Insurance scheme are paid regularly and

a proper record kept. If the contributions are not paid, the employee can lose his right to claim sickness or unemployment benefits, as well as his old age pension.

Under the old law, which was changed in 1975, an employer was legally obliged to stamp his employee's Insurance card each week and the Insurance card became important in another respect: whenever a man changed his job, he would have to give his new employer and his new employer would ask to be given, his Insurance card.

Scott explained that Thorpe had not paid the correct number of contributions towards his insurance, nor had he returned the current card at the end. The "retainer" payments made by Bessell were therefore understood to compensate Scott for the fact that he could not obtain a proper job until a new insurance card was somehow obtained for him, bearing in mind also that because of Jeremy Thorpe's failure to return his card he was deprived of the weekly unemployment benefit which he would have been able to claim.

Bessell had told the two reporters that the payments to Scott were made to tide him over until he went abroad, or until the position with his cards was resolved and he could get a job or benefit in the normal way.

## Chapter 11

As Penrose and Courtiour pressed on with their work through the hot summer months of 1976, Jeremy Thorpe and Norman Scott were no longer remote figures to them, viewed only through the distorting mirror of back newspaper clippings and unreliable rumour. Both Thorpe and Scott were inveterate letter writers. And people who claimed to know either the politician or the former model gave the reporters valuable, often colourful, descriptions of the two men, so that gradually their individual portraits emerged in sharp and sometimes embarrassing detail.

Jeremy Thorpe was the son of a former Conservative MP and successful barrister who died when the boy was 15. He was educated at Eton College which helped form his outlook but it was not the only influence on him. His early conversion from the family's traditional Conservative sympathies to a growing affection for the Liberal Party was largely brought about by his godmother, Megan Lloyd George, the daughter of David Lloyd George, the outstanding Liberal Prime Minister and Leader during the First World War.

After Eton and a few months of National Service, he went on to Oxford, where he became not only President of the Oxford Union, a prestigious springboard for many politicians, but also President of the Liberal Club and President of the Law Society.

Like his father he became a barrister, and, within three years of leaving university he was adopted as the Liberal Party's candidate for the rural constituency of North Devon which was then a Conservative seat. At the 1955 General Election, the Conservative candidate won. But in 1959 the future party leader gained the only Liberal breakthrough in a General Election that proved disappointing for his party: he won the North Devon seat.

Thorpe was an innovator and brought to British electioneering in the late 1950s what was later to be the hallmark of his campaigns: a certain show-business razzamataz. Wearing a brown hat, a snappy suit and a fixed wide smile, he exuded enthusiasm and confidence. The tactic at successive hustings – also adopted by



his friend and fellow West Country Liberal MP Peter Bessell – seemed to work brilliantly.

When Thorpe arrived at the House of Commons in 1959 Bessell recognised, he said, a complex personality, a man with a quick grasp of politics and an equally engaging talent for mimicry and fun. He well understood too, he told Penrose and Courtiour, why Norman Scott should become attracted to the young politician:

“To Scott, a youngster of 20 with a middle-class upbringing, Jeremy’s self-assurance, sense of fun, political success and attractive dynamic personality made him a likeable person, both as a private and public figure. It was easy to form a deep affection for him as I and many others did – it was not hard to believe that Scott would care deeply about Jeremy.”

From Norman Scott’s point of view, however, it was Jeremy Thorpe who had originally been responsible for the start of their relationship in 1960. Penrose and Courtiour heard Scott’s version when, in late May 1976, they visited him in Combe Martin in North Devon.

Norman Scott had moved into a tiny cottage there in the autumn of 1975, only a few days before Andrew Newton, the pilot, had shot his Great Dane, Rinka.

Ironically, Gloucester Cottage, where Scott lived, had once been used as the headquarters of the local Liberal Party. The cottage had been standing empty and its owner, Brian Cook, a newspaper reporter from Dorset, had offered it to Scott rent free.

Cook had originally met Scott in 1974, and when he heard his as yet unpublicised allegations against Mr Thorpe, had thought him nothing more than a crank and inveterate fantasiser. But in time Brian Cook and his wife came to sympathise with Scott’s story and, apart from lending him Gloucester Cottage, also helped with the writing of his autobiography.

But at the time of Penrose and Courtiour’s visit, few people in Combe Martin, as in the country as a whole, had any time for the “unemployed model”. Mr Thorpe had resigned as Liberal leader only a few days earlier, on 10 May, and many of the villagers were genuinely distressed that the popular politician, who still remained their local MP, had been damaged by unwholesome and, for them, unproven tittle-tattle.

Once, in nearby Barnstaple, Scott had been badly beaten by two unknown assailants, and left unconscious in the street. In fact, he still firmly believed that he was in great physical danger. Hence

one of the reporters’ basic reasons for visiting Combe Martin was to get on record a lengthy interview with him.

Inside Gloucester Cottage the television crew set up their 16mm camera and arranged the lighting. Norman Scott sat with Penrose in the middle of the open-plan room with its fashionable antique fireplace behind them. Around the whitewashed walls were pictures of him riding expensive horses over tough cross-country courses. There were also fashion photographs of him modelling expensive clothes in rich, often exotic surroundings.

Scott began talking openly about his life. He was no stranger to the camera now, although very little of what he had said had ever reached the television screen. Independent Television News, the BBC’s main rival, had interviewed him at length at the time of the Andrew Newton trial in March, but they had decided not to use any of the material.

Scott began by saying that he was educated at an ordinary secondary modern school, which he left at fifteen. His main interest was horses and he found a job as a working pupil at Van de Vater’s riding stables at Kingham in Oxfordshire. It was there, in the first half of 1960, that he had met the young, recently elected Liberal Member of Parliament for North Devon.

“I met Jeremy Thorpe over a stable door,” said Scott eagerly, “literally over a stable door. I was working on some horses, and I found him a warm sort of character.”

Scott claimed that he had confided in Thorpe that he had a number of problems, some of them connected with working for Van de Vater. The MP was sympathetic and offered to help him if the need arose. He also wrote to Scott once while he was still at Kingham.

But Scott did not take up his offer immediately. The young 20-year-old stable lad first sought psychiatric help and advice from the Ashurst Clinic in Oxford.

Scott continued by claiming that until late 1960 he was not a practising homosexual:

“I suppose I was a bisexual by inclination,” he admitted candidly, “I was really just horsey – keen on horses that is. I had had sort of relationships with girls and had been attracted to girls at school.”

The close friendship which had developed between the MP and the young man, according to Scott’s version, was more than a single incident, or even a casual affair. First Thorpe had paid

money for the room at 21 Draycott Place in Chelsea where he had visited Scott regularly over a period of several months in 1960 and 1961. Then Scott had moved into the MP's London flat at 66 Marsham Court in SW1, sometimes living there alone when the politician was in his constituency or abroad.

"For obvious reasons Jeremy didn't actually want me living with him at the time although he wanted me around."

When Thorpe started his friendship with Scott in 1960, the Liberal MP had immediately introduced the younger man to a new world inhabited by prominent, prosperous figures. Scott was fascinated by the glimpses he gained of life at the top.

In 1960 Great Britain was still a major power in international affairs. Harold Macmillan was the Conservative Prime Minister, a leader in the High Tory mould enjoying a large and comfortable majority at the House of Commons.

Norman Scott frequently went to the House of Commons and sat for hours listening to debates, determined, he said later, to "improve his mind and impress his friend".

When Scott walked casually through the corridors of the Palace of Westminster he might see not only the Prime Minister stride past, but world statesmen like Sir Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee on their way to the Voting Lobby. There were also less familiar political figures like Harold Wilson, who in 1960 was only in the foothills of fame as a member of Hugh Gaitskell's Shadow Cabinet.

Scott modelled himself on his famous friend even in the way he wrote letters and in his appearance and dress. He bought clothes at Thorpe's West End tailors and charged them to Thorpe's personal account. He stayed with Thorpe's friends and mixed in their circle and was accepted as a lively member of their company for his own as well as the MP's sake.

Scott was taken into private worlds normally never revealed to a young man from his background. According to Scott, Thorpe escorted him to the Reform Club in Pall Mall: an exclusive London Club, where he was allowed to meet other members and their guests.

The risk of possible exposure was a danger that both men faced, if what Scott alleged was true, particularly when they went out together in public.

Scott contended that Jeremy Thorpe faced political and social ruin every day of his life at Westminster because of his relationship

with him in the early 1960s. Such mutual danger to the MP and his companion created, he said, an automatic discretion when the two men moved outside social circles where such behaviour was tolerated. And it also developed a bond between the two of them.

Their close relationship with its attendant problems and risks, Scott said, was one of the few factors that bound them together. Scott did not share Thorpe's strong concern about South Africa, radical changes in Britain and the nurturing of the Liberal Party.

He did however show more than a casual interest in politics and international affairs. 1965, both at home and abroad. Newspaper headlines were regularly about subjects which were at the very centre of the young MP's life.

On 6 May, Thorpe's friend and fellow Old Etonian, the photographer Antony Armstrong-Jones, married the Queen's younger sister, Princess Margaret, at Westminster Abbey. The Royal wedding that summer was the high point of the social calendar and there was talk at one stage that Jeremy Thorpe might be chosen as best man.

Thorpe moved freely in circles that were influencing, sometimes directly controlling, the main changes that were taking place. Inexperienced, and a member of a party with only a handful of seats in Parliament, Thorpe nevertheless believed that he had a role to play in these major events. He told other friends, as well as Peter Bessell, that one day he would be Prime Minister of Great Britain.

With the drift towards radicalism in politics Jeremy Thorpe had grounds for his belief in a Liberal revival, even if his hopes of being Prime Minister, or simply Cabinet Minister, appeared fanciful. In the summer of 1960 there was an upsurge of support for the Liberals at a series of by-elections and in many municipal elections. The swing led eventually to Eric Lubbock's resounding Liberal victory at Orpington in Kent in March 1962.

Thorpe could afford to say that he had long forecast a dramatic improvement in his party's fortunes at the polls. Indeed the Liberal revival coincided, by chance, with his arrival at the House of Commons: a happy omen which did not go unnoticed by some of his supporters.

On 28 March 1962, the *Daily Mail* National Opinion Poll was to show the Liberals to be the most popular party in the country. Jeremy Thorpe witnessed this upsurge at Westminster and in the

country and was never to forget the elation of his colleagues and the dismay on the faces of his opponents.

In the shadows at Marsham Court or in days spent staying at the Broom Hill Hotel near Barnstaple, Scott too witnessed the happy, buoyant optimism of his friend, occasionally helping out with the party's campaign in Thorpe's North Devon constituency.

"I used to go canvassing in Lynton and Lynmouth," he said. "I stayed with various supporters and used to go round with a questionnaire. I suppose I helped a bit. But it was really just something for me to do. He drove me in to meet Lillian, his party agent in North Devon. She didn't show any surprise. I had to ring in and tell her what was going on. I used to get letters from Jeremy there."

The way the Liberal leader described this period in his second press statement on 14 March 1976, was to say that he and his mother had "helped" Norman Scott in different ways. Scott mentioned how, in the late autumn of 1961, the MP arranged for him to spend several weeks working for the British Honduras Hurricane Relief Fund.

In fact, the Liberal revival was to outlast Thorpe's friendship for Scott, but both were destined to peter out in the end. At the General Election in 1964 no new Liberal seats were added to their tally of nine at Westminster. But they had gained a fresh respect, politically speaking, from the defeated Conservatives and the victorious Labour Government of Harold Wilson.

The 1964 General Election was a personal triumph for Jeremy Thorpe. He had successfully turned the marginal seat he had won first in 1959 into a relatively safe Liberal seat with a comfortable majority of 5,136. However, his political advances were marred by irksome problems.

The relationship between Norman Scott and Jeremy Thorpe was apparently entering stormy waters. Scott recalled how he had told the police just before Christmas 1962 that he had wanted to shoot the MP.

"Amazingly enough I walked out of the police station without any charges being preferred against me. In fact, the police didn't say anything about why they would not charge me, they just kept the documents I had with me: letters from Jeremy to me and a postcard. They were very nice to me, very nice indeed, and I continued my relationship with Jeremy afterwards."

Altogether Scott claimed that his close friendship with Jeremy

Thorpe covered a period lasting from 1960 to Christmas 1964. Once he went alone to Switzerland, on other occasions to Northern Ireland, but invariably, he said, he would return to London or accompany the MP in his constituency in North Devon.

"It was a weird sort of situation, but I couldn't actually go away," he said. "Jeremy had taken over my Insurance cards, saying he would pay them for me. I couldn't leave: I was trapped in a sense. I was also very naive, you know, very stupid. I can see it now in retrospect."

For a long time, Mrs Josiffe, Scott's mother, who was once a Conservative candidate for the local council in Erith and Crayford in Kent, had been aware of her son's friendship with the MP. The situation only became clear to her after a puzzling incident in the very earliest stages when Norman Vater had called at the office where she worked and insisted on taking her to the House of Commons to meet Mr Thorpe. Later she attempted to stop the friendship but then she more or less gave up and concentrated on her own life, leaving Norman to his own devices. Her motives were mixed: not only did she disapprove of the relationship she also recognised that her son was suffering from mental stress.

In the autumn of 1964 Scott decided to get away from things and go abroad. He acknowledged that he could not bear the nervous strain any longer and hoped that a change of air and scenery would improve his health and general well-being. Through the advertisement columns of the *Horse and Hound* he found a job in a Swiss town called Porrentruy where he was to look after horses belonging to a "Dr François".

Thorpe was also enthusiastic about Scott's first trip abroad. Although Scott did not consult him beforehand, Thorpe believed that fresh surroundings and the chance to work with horses would help him. According to Scott, his friend helped him get his first passport – numbered FO 427989 – and signed on the back of Scott's photograph that it was a true likeness of the young man. Through his secretary, Jennifer King, he gave Scott the money to make the December train journey to Switzerland.

When Scott arrived in Porrentruy he lost his luggage which was not put off at the right station. The result was that he reached his new home carrying nothing but his passport and had no suitable clothes either for working in or to protect him against the snowy conditions.

Almost immediately he decided he wanted to return to London.

He said he missed Jeremy Thorpe's company and heartily disliked what little he had seen of the place where he was supposed to work.

Before leaving Porrentruy for London, after staying in the town for only forty-eight hours, he sent a picture postcard to his mother postmarked 6.12.64, in which he told her that it was "Impossible to be here! The conditions are impossible." And "I wish things were different but no. Can't say anything on paper. You know I would stay if I could. please [sic] do not worry."

When he got back to Victoria Station he had exactly half a Swiss franc in his pocket. According to Scott, the first thing he did was to contact Thorpe to tell him that he was back in London and that he had asked the people in Porrentruy to return his luggage, when it turned up, to the reception desk at Marsham Court. The MP, he claimed, told him on the telephone that in the circumstances he had better come over and stay at his flat, since he had nothing to wear and nowhere to go. Later Scott went to visit his mother who remembered her surprise at seeing him.

Mrs Josiffe agreed that her son must have been to Marsham Court to see Thorpe. "I remember he was going to have dinner with Jeremy that night and I know he had Jeremy's umbrella. I thought it was terrible, absolutely ghastly. But I loved Norman, and after all, if Norman wanted to be like that, well, that's that."

Scott's stay in Jeremy Thorpe's flat did not last long, however. The situation for a person of Scott's temperament was an intolerable one and he was soon compelled to move out. So he left the flat and went to live in Ireland.

The Republic of Ireland was not an arbitrary choice for Scott. He had thought that he could take up temporary employment there without needing his British Insurance cards. But there was a more pressing spiritual reason for his decision to go to a country with a large Roman Catholic majority: at that time he was experiencing, he claimed, the guilt and painful remorse which some Catholic homosexuals feel from their religious upbringing.

He went to Ireland, therefore, in the hope of finding not only escape from the painful memory of all the good times he had had with his friend but also to seek the kind of spiritual atmosphere he needed if his Church was right that homosexuality could be "cured" by abstinence. Nevertheless, while trying to effect this "cure", Scott occasionally contacted Thorpe and asked him to sort out his Insurance cards so that he could work in England again. He

also continued to express his worries about the letters in his suitcase and reminded the MP to forward his luggage. However, months went by and there was no news either of his Insurance cards nor of his luggage.

"In the end I was so worried I wrote to Jeremy's mother, Mrs Ursula Thorpe. I thought she must already know about our relationship: we had all been together so often. Increasingly I was concerned about the letters from Jeremy to me which were still in my suitcase somewhere. They could so easily have fallen into the wrong hands: perhaps into the criminal hands of blackmailers."

Scott's fear, the risk that compromising, incriminating letters might fall into the clutches of men who would use them for blackmail, was indeed grave for both men. Thorpe, now the Treasurer of the Liberal Party and increasingly prominent in public life, faced the greatest danger to his career, if what Scott said was true and he should ever be exposed.

In writing to the MP's mother, Scott was perhaps consciously aiming at a particularly vulnerable spot in Jeremy Thorpe's personality. He was known to be extremely close to his mother. Mrs Thorpe, it was true, did know that her son had been friendly over a period of time with young Norman Scott.

Scott had received no replies to the letters he had previously sent to Thorpe, requesting news about his luggage and Insurance cards. But his approach to Mrs Thorpe brought an immediate reaction.

Early in May 1965, Jeremy Thorpe invited Peter Bessell to lunch at the Ritz. The new Member of Parliament for Bodmin was surprised: he and Jeremy were both members of the National Liberal and Reform Clubs and would normally eat together at one of those. But Bessell was told that privacy was essential. The Ritz had one well-known feature: its dining tables were set well apart, allowing patrons to talk relatively freely.

"I realised that Jeremy was tense and nervous at once," explained Bessell, describing the scene that particular day. "He handed me a letter and asked me to read it."

Bessell said he found the handwriting hard to read on the blue stationery. The letter was several pages long and he saw it was addressed to Jeremy's mother.

"The letter described an affair the writer claimed he had once had with Jeremy. I remember it was signed Norman Josiffe, a name that did not mean anything to me at the time. Josiffe said

Jeremy had made promises to him which he had failed to keep. Altogether the letter was a pathetic document and the sort of letter a jilted woman might write."

Bessell offered to go to Dublin immediately to see Norman Josiffe and also a Roman Catholic priest who was then looking after the young Englishman. The MP would attempt to assess the situation, which was potentially very dangerous for his colleague.

"I'm not very interested in food generally," said Bessell. "But that day at the Ritz I can remember exactly what Jeremy had to eat. The moment I said I would help he began to eat steak tartare and salad ravenously. In time, I came to notice that it was a typical reaction: it followed every occasion when he wished to be free of something dangerous and unpleasant."

In Dublin Bessell went to see the priest:

"I made it clear there was no truth in the claims that the young man was making against Jeremy."

But the priest did not agree absolutely with Bessell. In fact, Bessell was not surprised at his reactions.

When eventually Penrose traced the priest, Father Sweetman, he instantly remembered Norman Josiffe.

Father Sweetman also described the meeting he had had twelve years before with Peter Bessell. The British MP had told him that Norman Josiffe's allegations were totally unfounded. "But I thought to myself," explained the priest, "if they are wholly untrue then why is a Member of Parliament coming all the way from London to make that clear?"

"After I had written the letter to Mrs Thorpe," said Scott, "a man called Peter Bessell arrived in Dublin. I didn't know he was a Liberal MP. I just had this card put under the door of my flat. It asked me to ring him, no matter what the time, at his hotel."

So Scott took the MP at his word and called Bessell at three o'clock in the middle of the night. Somewhat gruffly he was invited to breakfast at nine the same morning.

At their meeting, according to Scott, Bessell gave the impression that he had an extradition order signed by Sir Frank Soskice, the Home Secretary.

According to Bessell's recollections however, what he really told Scott was that the letter to Mrs Thorpe constituted a blackmail threat. "I told him that blackmail was an extraditable offence and that if Jeremy or I reported the matter to the Home Secretary, Frank Soskice, I had no doubt that he would order a police enquiry

that might result in an application to the Irish courts for an extradition order."

Bessell was apparently astonished when Scott replied:

"Well, that's marvellous, I can come back to England and get the whole matter sorted out."

When Bessell asked the young man if it was really true that he had once had a relationship with Jeremy Thorpe, he said he was shown convincing letters and other documents.

Not surprisingly perhaps in the circumstances, Bessell was not actually keen to see Scott return to England with him after this development. In the circumstances he counselled the young man not to talk to anyone about the matter and promised that he would try to help him immediately over the problems of the Insurance cards and the missing suitcase.

Perhaps Peter Bessell did not realise it, but he had just taken on a part-time job as troubleshooter which he was to go on doing for the next ten years.

## Chapter 12

The large suitcase Norman Scott mislaid in Switzerland, just before Christmas 1964, was in time to spark off an incident. For the suitcase did eventually turn up at Dr François Choquard's house in Porrentruy.

Penrose telephoned Dr Choquard in Switzerland and asked him if he remembered the man who came to stay at his house in 1964. Dr Choquard, a vet, had no difficulty in recalling a young Englishman called Norman and the circumstances which surrounded his short stay. Nor did Monsieur and Madame Jean Raymond, who share Dr Choquard's house in the village.

"In the two days he was with us in Porrentruy he was very homesick," said Madame Raymond.

But Scott had no money to return immediately to London, which he told Dr Choquard he wished to do. Fortunately his luggage would shortly arrive in Porrentruy and this presented the Swiss vet with a satisfactory solution. He would advance Scott sufficient money to get home to England and retain his suitcase as a form of guarantee.

On receiving his money from the British Consulate in Bern, Dr Choquard said that he then sent Scott's luggage to the Consulate. As far as he was concerned that was the last he heard of the affair. He did not know what the suitcase contained, nor apparently did the Consulate who kept Scott's luggage for a time at their offices in Bern.

As he had promised Scott in Dublin, Peter Bessell had done what he could to ensure the recovery of the suitcase. "I was in America on a normal business trip," he explained. "But I told my secretary – as I told all my secretaries – that if I was away the Scott problem was to receive absolute priority if it should arise."

The first Bessell heard of the luggage incident he said was in a telephone call from his secretary in London which he received in New York in the summer of 1965.

"Jeremy had phoned my secretary and asked her to drive with him one day in his car," said Bessell. "They collected Scott's

luggage and returned to his flat at Marsham Court. It was there that they recovered the bundles of letters which Scott had asked Jeremy to take."

Bessell's secretary had been very concerned at what had taken place. After all, she argued, the suitcase did not belong to Jeremy Thorpe. In fact, Scott had repeatedly urged the politician to recover the suitcase and remove the letters for him. But the secretary had misunderstood her role in the affair.

Bessell explained that she had nothing to fear. However she told her employer: "I'm worried, I'm upset. I should have had no part in this."

Once the letters had been safely recovered, the Liberal MP had then arranged for the suitcase to be sent to the Aer Lingus office in London for onward despatch to Scott in Dublin.

Nevertheless strictly the letters did belong to Scott and not to Jeremy Thorpe and, despite the fact that Scott had asked for their return, he claimed he never received them. According to Peter Bessell, Thorpe later passed them to him for safe-keeping. For his part Scott continued to press Mr Thorpe for his letters to be returned.

"I imagined Jeremy had probably destroyed them," he told the reporters.

Penrose called Bessell's former secretary and asked if she remembered anything about the luggage incident. Bessell had assured him that the woman would instantly recall the affair, but she immediately denied any knowledge of it, adding emotionally that she knew nothing about Norman Scott. She sounded nervous and hesitant, repeatedly asserting that her ex-boss was an out-and-out liar.

But Peter Bessell was not the only person who had heard about the suitcase and the letters. A probation officer called Peter Coghill remembered hearing the story from Bessell's secretary shortly after the incident had occurred. She was an old friend of the Coghill family and more than ten years before she had described the incident in front of him and his sister. At the beginning of 1976 he had in turn mentioned it casually to a freelance reporter he knew well. And the girl, Mary Elgood, had passed it on to the *Daily Mail's* newsdesk. But the story was never published.

Courtior and Penrose met Peter Coghill on 5 July 1976 and he showed them the affidavit he had made before lawyers for the



*Daily Mail* in February 1976 in which he had declared that Bessell's secretary had told him about the incident shortly afterwards. The affidavit went on:

"My memory is quite correct concerning this. It made an impression on me at the time because I was then fairly active in Liberal party politics. I spoke about it in the late 1960s at the National Liberal Club to a Mr Terence Gleed-Richards now prospective Parliamentary candidate for a Bournemouth constituency."

Courtiour rang Terence Gleed-Richards and asked him if he knew Peter Coghill. He did, and he recalled how Coghill had talked at the Club about a Liberal MP and some luggage many years before.

On Thursday 15 July, Penrose called on Bessell's ex-secretary at her home in South London. The woman told him once more that she knew nothing about the Scott affair or any missing luggage. She appeared to be frightened of publicity which in any way linked her with Peter Bessell. She had once had an affair with the MP and did not want it known.

But it was not to be the end of that particular story. On a third occasion five months later, she did confirm that the letters had existed. And she did not deny that she had helped recover Scott's suitcase in the presence of Jeremy Thorpe.

But after confirming Bessell's story she said: "I have friends in high places who could put a stop to any enquiry."

Far from being put off by these occasional rebuffs, however, Courtiour and Penrose were now pursuing enquiries in several different directions. If they seemed to some people to be pressing rather hard in the area of the Scott story it was because of their concern over its wider consequences.

But when Harold Wilson had encouraged the two reporters to follow up his allegations that the South Africans had been behind a smear against Jeremy Thorpe, had he, they wondered, realised what a complex and confusing scenario their investigation would reveal? In fact, the ex-Prime Minister had given them relatively few direct clues: as he had said at their first meeting, they would have to feel their own way forward. But he had suggested at another of their meetings in his room at the House of Commons that they contact two people, Helen Keenan and Norman Blackburn, who had been imprisoned some years before for stealing Cabinet papers on Southern Africa.

So Courtiour went carefully through the files he had collected in 1971 when he had helped to produce the BBC documentary about a South African spy network which had operated in Britain. He noticed that a journalist called Gordon Winter, who had been living in London at that time, had contributed some of the material for the film.

The 20-year-old Helen Keenan had been a secretary at the Cabinet Office, and had stolen confidential papers which she had passed to Blackburn. They included secret information about mineral wealth in Zambia and the minutes of a Cabinet Committee, presided over by Harold Wilson, where future policy on Rhodesia had been discussed. Blackburn in turn had made certain that the documents reached Rhodesia and BOSS headquarters in Pretoria.

Sir Harold mentioned that it had been his idea to recruit Cabinet Office secretaries from a wider social background than in the past. Helen Keenan was the daughter of a Yorkshire schoolteacher and was intended to be one of the first of a "new breed" of recruit. So, embarrassingly, his scheme had backfired badly from the very beginning.

Courtiour began looking for Helen Keenan, but she had apparently disappeared since completing her prison sentence. Norman Blackburn was living quietly in the Isle of Man and seemed happy enough to talk about his earlier experiences as a spy.

He told Courtiour that relatively little about the network he had once worked for had emerged at his trial.

"My job was to check up on people and to infiltrate African organisations," he said.

Blackburn claimed that any organisation hostile towards South Africa or Rhodesia was a potential target for BOSS and Rhodesian intelligence. One of his jobs had been to work inside the Anti-Apartheid Movement offices in London. He had also been instructed to investigate British MPs who were openly critical of South Africa. And he explained that money to "buy" informers, and to pay for his services, had never been a problem.

Blackburn had named his "contact" at the South African Embassy as a man called Kruger. The diplomat was handed information he had collected about Black Nationalist groups and British politicians. He mentioned the death in January 1970 of Keith Wallis, another agent working for South Africa, whose body was found in mysterious circumstances in a ventilation shaft in a

block of apartments in central London. Blackburn was convinced that Wallis had been murdered by BOSS because he talked too much and had altogether stepped out of line.

If Norman Blackburn was telling the truth, his story would appear to support at least part of Sir Harold's allegations of political interference inside Britain. And the former Prime Minister made other assertions. He had mentioned British right-wing groups like the Yorkshire-based White Rose and the League of St George. He said they were virulently anti-Labour and he suspected that much of their finance had come from southern African sources.

Courtiour and Penrose had already spent months working their way through possible leads in this particular area, but one of their most interesting contacts came again from the work that Courtiour had done in 1971 for the BBC documentary on South African spies. Sir Harold had told them that the conspiracy against democracy had "South African participation" but he had not spoken initially about the actual Government of South Africa and its Bureau for State Security. He had said that the interference was "based on massive resources of business money and private agents of various kinds and various qualities". Courtiour wondered whether this distinction between the public and the private sector in foreign interference was actually a valid one.

While researching for the documentary, he had met a private detective named Ian Withers, who, with his brother Stuart, ran a firm, appropriately called Detectives, with branches all over the country. In a series of meetings Ian Withers spoke about the "political" work they had accepted in the past. It included spying on diplomats for the Royal Nepalese Embassy in London; examining "bugging" equipment at the former Yugoslav Embassy in Kensington Gore; and working on occasion for the South African Embassy at Trafalgar Square.

Withers claimed he went to the South African Embassy on about six occasions. He had agreed to trace individuals who had emigrated to South Africa and then returned to Britain. The emigrants had accepted "assisted passages" and then broken their agreements. The South African Government wanted its money back and had hired private detectives to help.

"We also tried to sell the South African Embassy security apparatus," Withers said, reluctant to add if his efforts had been successful.

The detective did say, however, that he had been hired for other secret assignments connected with South Africa. Courtiour already knew that in 1968 the Christopher Roberts agency had monitored the activities of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain. Two years later the same detective agency was employed to investigate the use of Parliamentary services by MPs sympathetic to the Anti-Apartheid Movement. One of the investigators involved in that surveillance was Ian Withers.

"We were employed by a lawyer who said he represented a Member of Parliament at Westminster," said Withers, referring to the second investigation. "The brief was to ascertain if the Anti-Apartheid Movement was obtaining official House of Commons notepaper for propaganda purposes."

In 1970 letters commemorating the Sharpeville massacre, which had taken place in South Africa exactly a decade earlier, were being sent out in thousands by Anti-Apartheid supporters. The letters were printed on House of Commons notepaper and so looked as if Parliament was in some way backing a political movement then directing its fire against a foreign regime. The Serjeant-at-Arms at the Commons had made it clear in the past that such an abuse of official Commons paper, however righteous a cause might appear, was a flagrant breach of parliamentary privilege.

According to Withers, some of the notepaper came from one prominent Liberal MP's office, with or without his permission.

Withers claimed that many London agencies work on occasion for anonymous clients who are probably South African. He sketched in the background of a case to illustrate what he meant. In 1968 he had been hired to make enquiries about the Dean of Johannesburg, the Very Reverend Gonville French-Beytagh, and an English woman named Alison Norman.

According to Withers, the client, a South African "journalist", who preferred not to reveal his real name, wanted to know if money donated in Britain to an organisation called Defence and Aid was really going to guerrillas in southern Africa. The World Council of Churches, among other groups, wanted the money to help refugees and political figures on trial in South Africa. Within weeks Withers discovered that cash was being fed to Alison Norman's private bank accounts. Miss Norman then transferred the money to South Africa. Some of those groups to receive

financial help were illegal and therefore, in South African terms, terrorists.

Withers told Penrose and Courtiour that Alison Norman and the<sup>2</sup> Dean of Johannesburg were followed and their contacts noted. This information was used at the Dean's trial in Johannesburg in 1971.

For the reporters, it all smacked very much of the undercover activities Sir Harold had talked about at Lord North Street. They wondered if they were at last getting somewhere in the area of the South African connection.

Wither's information seemed important for several reasons. Once again a man was openly admitting that he had certain links with the South Africans. It was widely believed that South African agents did sometimes adopt the cover of "journalists" in order to pursue their real profession as spies. After all, Withers himself agreed that the South African in question might not have been a bona fide newspaper reporter. He also accepted that he did not know where his information had eventually reached. Could it have landed straight on the desk of General Van den Bergh at his Intelligence headquarters in Pretoria? Indeed could it have helped put more people in South Africa into detention?

The discussion turned to other private investigators. It had crossed the reporters' minds that the South Africans might have used unscrupulous detectives to rob Harold Wilson and his political staff. Scotland Yard had not been able to solve the whole series of break-ins which had plagued prominent Labour figures. Perhaps BOSS, or other South Africans, had perpetrated those crimes through "third parties" in much the same way as Ian Withers had been employed by unknown clients. Penrose asked Withers if his profession had a fair sprinkling of rogues who might break the law for money. He said at once, "There are individuals, call them agents if you will, who are prepared to do anything," he said. "One can always find and employ such people for a specific sum of money to do a specific sort of thing."

Withers went on to mention an enquiry which another company had handled several years before. Two agents associated with Barry Quartermain's Provincial Investigations agency, now defunct, had trailed a young man in Ireland.

News of the contract had soon reached Withers on the grapevine that exists between agents. Prominent figures connected with the Liberal Party had apparently hired the two private detectives to

monitor discreetly the movements of a "man called Norman Scott" in Ireland. Courtiour recalled that Scott had been in Dublin from 1965 until the early summer of 1967.

According to Withers, the "Scott case" was not the only assignment which the Liberals had provided. Another agency, this time in West London, had been employed to investigate an alleged misappropriation of Liberal Party funds.

For the reporters the irony of the stories Withers had told was the fact that all three detective agencies had worked on occasion for South Africans. The two agents in Ireland might or might not have known that their rival employers, the Liberals and the South Africans, would dearly like to have known about the other. It was yet another example of how the Scott story would continually crop up in their own investigations, often when they least expected it.

Ian Withers went on to explain that Barry Quartermain had also forged strong links with South Africa. In 1973 he had hurried to Johannesburg from London and had started a detective agency there which had temporarily flourished. But the detective had got into minor trouble with the South African police, an unhappy habit he had earlier experienced in Britain. Withers had kept a news clipping which had appeared in the South African Press. It was an article about Barry Quartermain and Ian Withers and it was by the Johannesburg journalist Gordon Winter. Both reporters began reading it eagerly. It was dated 13 January 1974 and began:

The British private detective Mr Barry Quartermain, who was arrested in Natal this week, was described by a London colleague last night as one of the staunchest allies South Africa has ever had and a man who deserves to be granted political asylum over there. Mr Ian Withers, head of a private detective agency based in Brighton, was commenting on reports that Mr Quartermain may be sent back to England where he is wanted by Scotland Yard men investigating Government leaks . . . .

Mr Withers, a long-standing friend of Mr Quartermain, continued: "Barry is a political animal who is hated by British left-wingers because he has compiled extensive files on many leading Communists. He is a strong right-winger and the leftists will clap their hands in delight at the irony of it if Pretoria kicks him out."

Withers told the reporters that Gordon Winter had known Quartermain in London. The South African journalist had made a point of keeping in regular touch with several private investigators including Withers. The three men had also crossed paths at anti-apartheid demonstrations and meetings in London. The detectives had sometimes attended rallies on behalf of clients who preferred to remain anonymous. Winter, of course, had attended such occasions as a reporter and people like Peter Hain remembered him for being very active with his camera. He was always taking countless photographs of demonstrators milling around. But then he was a photo-reporter even if later some of his critics believed he might be a South African "spy".

When Penrose raised the question of a South African conspiracy with Peter Bessell in one of their frequent conversations on the telephone, the former politician simply laughed.

"I think the idea of a South African plot in relationship to what I know of Jeremy's involvement with Scott is just garbage," he said emphatically. He added that he did not know of any detective agency making enquiries about Scott on behalf of Jeremy Thorpe or the Liberal Party.

But at Lord North Street, Sir Harold had been quick to suggest that Bessell might have been approached by South African Intelligence. After all, he was ideally placed for years as Thorpe's close friend and confidant. Indeed why else should he become something of a turncoat against his former Party leader?

Bessell spoke on the phone with an extraordinary frankness. He also sent long typewritten letters to the two reporters confirming and expanding the points they had discussed. These contained countless individual stories that newspaper editors would have paid large sums for. But he explained that it was a considerable relief to him to know that whatever he disclosed to Penrose and Courtiour would not be in the papers the next day.

However, what Bessell said did go regularly to the BBC's Director-General in the form of detailed day notes that the two reporters kept religiously in a red plastic file. Sir Charles then showed the notes to a select group of Corporation executives who knew about the secret link with the former Premier.

On Sunday 6 June, Bessell again picked up the story of his visit to Dublin in 1965. When he had returned to London, he explained, he had reported straight back to Jeremy Thorpe.

Thorpe, he said, listened to his colleague's report on his meeting

with Norman Scott and then revealed that yet another problem had arisen while Bessell was in Ireland. The North Devon police had started an investigation following an earlier enquiry by Scotland Yard.

Thorpe said he was "desperately worried" about the situation in which he found himself. He asked Bessell if he would talk to George Thomas, who was then a Minister of State at the Home Office (he was later to become Speaker of the House of Commons). Thomas, like Bessell, was a member of the Methodist Brotherhood: he was a past President, and Bessell the President-Elect.

"I thought oh Jesus Christ," said Bessell, his deep voice and the un-Methodist-like turn of phrase emphasising the predicament in which he found himself. "Anyway I went to see George Thomas, and I told him the whole story. How I had been to Ireland and seen Scott, or Josiffe as he then was."

Bessell then began imitating George Thomas's South Wales accent. "'Oh that's very careless. Oh my word, that's very careless. So there's a police enquiry! Well, what do you want me to do?'"

Bessell wanted the Minister to stop the police enquiry and destroy the file on Norman Scott and Jeremy Thorpe. "But I thought to myself it's no good asking him to do that because I damn well know he will shit himself on the spot. I said to him: 'Well, do you think it would be better if I saw the Home Secretary?' And George Thomas agreed at once it would be a very good idea and he would arrange that."

When the MP told his friend what had happened, Thorpe explained that the mere ending of the police enquiries was not enough.

"He said: 'There must be a hell of a file on this thing. It is no problem while Harold Wilson and Labour are in power, but what happens if the Conservatives get back?'" According to Bessell Thorpe believed strongly that if the former Tory Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, returned to 10 Downing Street, the whole matter would be given very different treatment.

Bessell readily agreed with Jeremy Thorpe's assessment of the situation. He fixed his appointment with the Home Secretary via George Thomas. Bessell wanted his meeting in May 1965 kept strictly private.

"Frank Soskice was a sweet man, a very sweet man," said Bessell, speaking slowly, still remembering the meeting that had

taken place more than ten years before. "He had a file on the desk in front of him and as he talked he kept patting it with his hand. I sat in his office and told him the whole story, and kept absolutely nothing wrapped up."

The former MP described the file on the Home Secretary's desk as being modestly thick, tied up with a ribbon: an ordinary manilla folder. He was fairly certain from the way Sir Frank was tapping the file that it was the Scott police file.

"The Home Secretary then said: 'What you are really saying is that you want me to see what the state of the investigation is?' So I replied: 'Yes, that's it.' Sir Frank mentioned that it was 'a pity about all the letters'."

Bessell was startled, he said, by the reference to letters; obviously sensitive letters. Jeremy Thorpe had told him nothing about any letters which the police had in their possession. Indeed he was surprised to learn that Scotland Yard had been involved with Scott as far back as 1962. The MP suddenly felt he had not been fully briefed about the affair.

"Then Frank Soskice launched into a tirade against Norman Scott," Bessell said. "Absolutely blasted Scott from here to eternity and I had said nothing about Scott that would cause him to do so."

Bessell claimed that his argument had been that Scott, if he had not been taken advantage of, had not been well treated by Jeremy Thorpe and was therefore more dangerous for that very reason. Sir Frank then spoke strongly for a change in the law on homosexuality in the next Parliament. But, of course, the law had *not* been reformed and he, as a lawyer, had to take solemn note of that fact!

"I had the feeling that here was Sir Frank Soskice, the Home Secretary, an utterly honourable man: his conscience and emotion saying to him that it was hateful that Jeremy should be brought down by Scott. And I remember he called Scott 'this creature'," said Bessell. "And it stuck in his liberal gullet: he couldn't bear it."

Bessell, however, was well aware that there was another forceful side of the argument to consider.

"The other half of Frank Soskice was saying: 'I am the Home Secretary and I don't know if I can deal with this. You know, Peter, that I am here to uphold the law, even though it's a damn stupid law!'"

"I don't say that Frank Soskice said those words," said Bessell, "he did not use *those* words at all, but that was what he was implying all the way through our meeting that afternoon."

Bessell said he reminded the Home Secretary about Thorpe's promising career at Westminster. He spoke of Thorpe's humane and humanitarian record as a politician. Frank Soskice, he added, had the highest regard for Thorpe: "He was a great asset to Parliament and a good constituency MP." The Home Secretary was sympathetic towards his colleague's plight, he felt. He was very strongly on his side.

More cynically, Bessell was also aware that he had approached a leading member of the Labour Government at an opportune moment: even if Sir Frank did not take that into consideration himself. In the early summer of 1965 the Labour Party's survival might well have depended on Liberal votes. There had been a good deal of to-ing and fro-ing between the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and the Liberal leader, Jo Grimond.

"You know, if three Labour MPs were to die," Bessell suggested to Penrose, "then would three Liberals abstain in a crucial vote?"

When Harold Wilson became Prime Minister on 16 October 1964, Labour had been voted in with a bare overall majority. In his political memoirs Sir Harold admitted that his Government throughout 1965 "continued to live dangerously".

The former Labour Premier, Clement Attlee, had once claimed it was not possible in the British parliamentary system to maintain a government with a majority of less than ten, but here was a Government with an effective majority of only five, which was later to be reduced even further.

The Liberals to some extent held the balance of that early Wilson Government, just as they were to do more than a decade later. At least in 1965 they held substantially more power in Parliament than their voting strength of nine seats suggested.

When the Speaker, Sir Harry Hylton-Foster, died on 2 September 1965, the newspapers and politicians spoke of the imminent collapse of the Labour Government (for now their tiny majority would be reduced by one with the nomination – and therefore removal – of the new Speaker from their ranks).

Some observers predicted what was called a "Lib-Lab" alliance. It was the same situation which was to be repeated in March 1977. The Liberals were virtually in a position to force an election if they chose.

"The Liberal Party in 1965 didn't necessarily want an election," said Bessell forcefully. "And neither did the Labour Party or even the Conservatives at the time. But the Tories could always be driven to a point where they were made to force the hand of the Government."

Some observers might see more than the future of Jeremy Thorpe as being at stake in the early summer of 1965: it could even be the life of the Government itself if Labour lost their overall majority through the torpedoing of Liberal support.

"So there was a double thing going here," explained Bessell. "If the Liberal Party was suddenly delivered a severe blow – and one of their number alleged to have had a homosexual relationship – there could be immediate political repercussions. We might all have lost our Parliamentary seats!"

However conscious of his duty he might be – and Sir Frank Soskice enjoyed the highest reputation as Home Secretary – he had a problem involving political as well as moral and legal considerations.

"So he said: 'All right I won't meet you again, you have made the decision clear, you have told me the essential problem.' He told me that it was good of me to help."

The Home Secretary said that he would inform George Thomas about any developments. Thomas could then let him know.

So Peter Bessell came out of this crucial meeting not knowing what the final outcome would be, but needing to reassure his colleague: "I told Jeremy not to worry. But he did ask me later if I had heard, or whether the file had been destroyed. But nothing happened in May, June and then it was the beginning of July. I told him: 'The essence of the matter is speed. I just don't believe that anything is going to happen.'" But Jeremy Thorpe had replied: "That's maybe true, but the file is still there."

A few days later Bessell saw George Thomas at the House of Commons.

"I thanked him for arranging the meeting with the Home Secretary," said Bessell.

"Don't worry about the Barnstaple file, it's been returned to Scotland Yard," explained George. "What about proceedings?" I said. And he replied: 'There will be none.' And I said: 'That's splendid news.' George said: 'Don't worry about it, it's all over.' I then asked: 'What about the actual file?' bearing in mind that the Yard wasn't obviously the best place for the file. But George said:

'Don't worry about that either: it won't be there much longer' or something like that. I don't think he said it would be destroyed, but he did say it 'would not be there much longer'. He said something that conveyed to me something that made me believe that the file would find its way to the Home Office."

The Liberal MP naturally concluded from this that Thorpe no longer faced the possibility of political embarrassment in Court and that he might provoke a General Election by resigning his seat.

"When next I saw Sir Frank Soskice in the Voting Lobby," Bessell continued, "and it was one of those days when there was a small vote – and even the Home Secretary voted – I said: 'I spoke to George Thomas the other day and I understand that everything is all right."

'I really can't say how much I appreciated not only the way you have seen me, but the fact that the business has now been resolved.'"

According to Bessell, Sir Frank had replied: "That's all right, it's over; any news of the creature?"

The MP knew the Home Secretary was referring to Scott, then known as Josiffe. "I said: 'Yes, he is still in Dublin and there is no reason to think he is coming back yet.'

"Oh that's very good. You have persuaded Jeremy not to have anything more to do with him?"

"Yes, I told you that it's all over, there is no question of that."

"Well, I hope there is no question of that because this is very risky, very bad."

"Well," said Bessell, "I don't know his exact words but the impression I got was that he was saying 'We have got a naughty boy out of a scrape, but next time, buddy, there is going to be no quarter given. He has got to learn his lesson and whilst I am sympathetic to the problem, I really don't like MPs at the House of Commons getting themselves mixed up with people like Norman Josiffe.'"

Penrose put down the telephone receiver and immediately played back to himself the recording of this astonishing conversation with Bessell. It was three o'clock in the morning in London but the reporter decided to begin work at once transcribing it from his tape-recorder into the Red File notes.

Already the two reporters had checked out some of Bessell's recollections and he appeared to have a remarkable memory for

situations and conversations. Often a second person would recall a conversation in precisely the same terms, sometimes even quoting the same words that Bessell said had been used ten years before.<sup>3</sup>

But where could they confirm the occurrence of that important interview with the Home Secretary except by obtaining the confidence of Sir Frank Soskice himself? And would he be prepared to discuss a subject which had such far-reaching implications?

In great doubt about whether they would obtain the confirmation they sought, Penrose and Courtiour went to see Sir Frank Soskice on 3 June 1976, at his home in North London. Although now a member of Britain's Second Chamber, the House of Lords, with the title of Lord Stow Hill, he rarely spoke in Parliament because of his poor health.

Despite being physically frail, Lord Stow Hill was an eager conversationalist, animated it seemed by talk of Parliament and events from his political past. The conversation turned gradually to the Thorpe-Scott affair. A lawyer by training, Lord Stow Hill expressed sadness at the publicity the story had received in the Press.

"When I've talked the matter over with other lawyers," he said, "we could not understand why Jeremy had not sued Norman Scott for slander. Jeremy has apparently said he would not bother because Scott had no money. But that is not why a man goes to court to fight slander: he goes to clear his name; not to win damages."

Relaxed and amiable, the eminent administrator recalled vividly his days as Home Secretary from October 1964 to December 1965. The reporters asked him if he remembered Peter Bessell and an incident which the latter claimed had taken place in the summer of 1965? Did he recall a meeting taking place at the Home Office and encounters at the House of Commons?

Lord Stow Hill paused before replying. He wanted it made clear that he would answer their questions, but that some of his replies would be on the record, others off.

"I seem to remember Bessell saying that Jeremy had a problem with a young man who was making allegations of a homosexual relationship," he said. "It was my advice to Bessell that they treat the young man rough. Do not allow him to get any hold over Jeremy. I remember saying: 'Tell him to go to hell: get rid of him quick.'"

Lord Stow Hill described the meeting in much the same way as they had first heard the story on the phone from Bessell in California.

"I was rather surprised," he continued, "that Jeremy had not come to me directly on the matter. Jeremy was a friend, I liked him, but perhaps he had been embarrassed about the affair."

"The normal course of events when threats are made against a prominent person would be for the Home Secretary to check with the Chief Constable of the area. If the Chief Constable felt that things were under control then probably no further action would be taken."

In particular the reporters were puzzled about why police enquiries had apparently stopped in December 1962, at the time when Norman Scott had made a long statement to them. The Home Secretary in 1962 had been a Conservative: the late Henry Brooke. The reporters had heard a suggestion that a prominent public figure, not an MP, had approached Mr Brooke and asked the Tory Home Secretary to intervene in police enquiries into the Scott affair.

Lord Stow Hill could not therefore help them with a specific answer, only a more generalised explanation of procedure.

"If the matter involved a criminal offence then the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions would be sought," he explained. "This was especially true in matters of homosexuality and, say, abortion, where prosecutions could be related to the climate of public opinion at any given moment."

Lord Stow Hill felt unable to comment further: in any case he had forgotten some of the details surrounding the matter he had to deal with in 1965. Nevertheless he had confirmed much of Bessell's essential story. For some reason the affair had been passed over; but if the former Home Secretary knew why, he would not give the complete answer now.

And what had Lord Stow Hill meant by Chief Constables having events "under control" in their area? Although the BBC men spent nearly four hours talking with Lord Stow Hill he did not explain that point. He told them that he did not need to remind them that, as a former Cabinet Minister, he was still governed by the Official Secrets Act. However, before Courtiour and Penrose left his house that afternoon he promised to help them further, although later he was to change his mind. He felt he had a duty to



help journalists on constitutional questions where his legal and Parliamentary experience might prove useful to them.

Both reporters realised they needed further insight into the meeting Bessell had described with Frank Soskice. Who had arranged it and what had been the outcome of it behind the scenes?

Bessell had already mentioned that his approach to the Home Secretary had been made via George Thomas, then a Minister of State at the Home Office. But would George Thomas, who was now the Speaker of the House of Commons and a figure beyond impeachment at the centre of that noble institution, confirm his part in the story too? Approaching "Mr Speaker" at Westminster was a difficult, if not impossible, task for any journalist. The Speaker's Office surrounded him traditionally with special protections and one of them was keeping the Press at a dignified distance. On 8 June, Penrose wrote to George Thomas at the House of Commons asking for a private interview and explaining the area he wished to discuss. But four days later, he received a reply, not from George Thomas himself, but from the Speaker's Secretary, Brigadier N. E. V. Short.

The letter, dated 11 June 1976, said: "The Speaker had asked me to thank you for your letter of 8th June about your talk with Lord Stow Hill. I have discussed with Mr Speaker, and he thinks that in regard to any matter which may have taken place during his time as a Minister, your best plan would be to get in touch with the Department concerned; in this case the Home Office. He assumes that their records, in this as in any other matter of public interest, would be sufficient to satisfy any legitimate enquiries."

Courtiour had also heard one of Sir Harold's political aides mention the name of Alice Bacon. She too had been a Minister of State at the Home Office while Frank Soskice was Home Secretary. So perhaps she too knew something about his confidential meeting with Bessell? In the meantime she now sat in the House of Lords as Baroness Bacon and her home was in Yorkshire. So Courtiour telephoned her there. He explained to her that he and a colleague had discussed the events of 1965 with Lord Stow Hill and went over some of the salient points he knew. He wanted her to know that he was not just fishing for a story: he did have details which he wanted confirmed. Lady Bacon sounded surprised that a former Home Secretary would have discussed such a confidential topic at all.

"He actually told you this?" interrupted the ex-Labour Minister. "Look, I don't know any more than Frank Soskice would have been able to tell you."

But *what* did she know of the affair exactly, the reporter asked politely, hoping she would not refuse to talk.

"There is also a whole list of things that one, when one is a Minister, especially at the Home Office, gets to know," she said. "But one doesn't divulge what happens."

Courtiour steered her back to that afternoon in the summer of 1965 when Bessell went to see Frank Soskice. But Lady Bacon was hesitant, wishing to know what he had said about the affair. And Peter Bessell: what were his recollections of what had taken place? She began chuckling on the phone, adding that she knew what the journalist was attempting to do.

"You get information from Frank Soskice, then you go on to the next person and say you got this from me."

Courtiour was dismayed: here was an old campaigner who had experience of how journalists pieced a story together. He was not going to get any further. But Lady Bacon's curiosity seemed to get the better of her; she was still intrigued to discover how *he* knew about the affair in the first place.

"There are only two people who know this," she said with confidence. "One is a BBC man and the other is Harold Wilson himself. So I was wondering where your information had come from?"

Lady Bacon was wrong: there were not just two people who knew something of the affair.

"Actually, there was an intermediary between Frank Soskice and Peter Bessell, and it wasn't me," she said. "It was somebody who is in quite a high place at the moment."

She paused again for a few seconds. Courtiour mentioned one name: George Thomas.

"That's right," she replied immediately. "It was he who told me what happened. Bessell had got him to get an interview with Frank Soskice, as he then was. The story was that he was being blackmailed and wanted to stop the blackmail money being paid. He wanted to be assured that he could stop the blackmail being paid, but that there would be no prosecution."

Lady Bacon went on to explain that she had only heard the story from "the Welshman", a reference again to the Welsh MP George Thomas. "It was he who told me what happened, so I don't know

directly. I mean this is all hearsay," she added rather apprehensively.

According to her, when she had heard that Bessell's meeting with the Home Secretary was to take place, she had been horrified.

"I tried to stop the interview," she said with obvious regret, "but it was too late. But of course Frank Soskice didn't know why Bessell was going to see him. Until Bessell walked into the room he had not the slightest idea why he was going to see him. Otherwise I suppose he wouldn't have seen him."

Up till then everything that Bessell, Lord Stow Hill and she had recalled about the extraordinary meeting in 1965 seemed to tie neatly together. However, Lady Bacon was now suggesting that the Home Secretary did not know the purpose of the meeting before it took place. Bessell had been adamant on that point: he claimed the Home Secretary did know in advance why he wanted to see him.

But Alice Bacon believed Frank Soskice had not been aware of the reason for the meeting: she was equally adamant about the point.

"George Thomas knew why Bessell wanted to see Soskice, but George Thomas I don't think told Soskice," she explained emphatically.

"I was told by George Thomas about five minutes before the interview was taking place. George walked into my room and told me what was happening and how he felt an idiot. He felt terrible. I think he is just a little bit naive. I said: 'Good God, you haven't said that?' and he said: 'Yes, I have.'"

"He had come in to see me because he was a little doubtful about what he had done. As I said, I got up and tried to stop the interview but Peter Bessell was already with him. And that was what happened."

Lady Bacon sounded more relaxed than when the conversation had begun. She asked Courtiour whether Lord Stow Hill had told him the advice he gave. The reporter had heard from the former Home Secretary that Thorpe should send the blackmailer, Norman Scott, to hell! "It was my advice to Bessell that they treat the young man rough," Lord Stow Hill had recalled.

"Yes, but what did he say?" pressed Lady Bacon. The reporter did not know.

"Oh, as I heard it, he told him simply to go home to his mother." She laughed at the recollection. "You see, George Thomas likes to

be very kindly to everybody," she continued. "He was friendly with Bessell and completely taken in by him and then began to have doubts. George is a very nice man. I think he was just trying to do Bessell a good turn."

But she was still firmly trying to work out how Courtiour had heard the story.

"I don't think that it is anybody that you would have come across," she said, warning the reporter that there was a danger of libel in the story. "I have forgotten what you said your name was?"

"Courtiour."

"Thank you, well goodbye," said the Baroness hurriedly.

Courtior was delighted with the confirmation he had received from the former Minister of State. Bessell did seem to be telling the truth in an area in which he might easily have embroidered things. How could he have known that they would be able to check his story with some of the highest people in the land? But one of these people had actually now extended the story much further.

## Chapter 13

Peter Bessell needed to keep only a watching brief on Norman Scott for almost two years after that summer crisis of 1965. But this did not mean that he or Jeremy Thorpe could relax completely. Scott sent letters direct to Thorpe asking about his Insurance cards, and tried to reach him by telephone, and although the MP did not reply it could not have helped his peace of mind.

"I can't be certain if it was in 1967 or later," Bessell told Penrose, "but around that time I noticed that when there was a Scott crisis in progress Jeremy seemed able to relax: he was content to leave it to me to deal with. But when the storm had passed and I was able to relax Jeremy showed a new and obsessive anxiety. He would spend as much of my time as I would allow in going over all kinds of hypothetical dangers and how they might be averted."

It was certainly clear that Scott's psychological difficulties did not lend themselves readily to the kind of solution offered by his religion. At one time he had gone as far as to seek sanctuary at a monastery in Waterford, but soon found the institution too rigorous.

In Dublin he struck up a friendship with a former Mayor and Irish MP, and this liaison, also potentially criminal in the eyes of the law in Ireland, came to the attention of the police. Late one night, shortly after his politician friend had left him, Special Branch officers arrived and questioned him about the relationship. Scott was eventually taken under police escort to the Grange Gorman Mental Hospital and, oddly, kept in the geriatric wing for forty-eight hours. Scott could never escape later from the horror of waking up in the morning to find his bed surrounded by night-shirted figures, with their disturbed features and abnormal gesticulations. To a young man who was rather conscious of his own physical attractiveness, it was the ultimate image of what might happen to him if he were ever to be locked away against his will.

With a new determination, Scott went back to the world of horses and fashion.

Then, in the spring of 1967, when he was living in lodgings in Dublin he got in touch with Peter Bessell once again. His letter of 20 April began: "It is with regret that I write to you for I know you don't want to remember me." It was signed Norman Scott, Bessell noticed, not, as up to now, Norman Josiffe.

Scott seemed basically cheerful. He was full of enthusiasm for the new life he had discovered and wrote with obvious pride: "I have been doing very well in Ireland, of all things as a male model!! Have done several TV commercials and also stills for magazines." He also added that he had a horse and "she is going well".

But he outlined his latest problem: he was about to make a trip to America, but had lost his passport when "upset over Jeremy". In any case, he would be going under his new name of Norman Scott, and needed help in changing his name legally.

Almost ten years later, on 9 December 1976, Scott was to approach the Passport Office in London asking for written confirmation of the "person who signed the back of my passport photograph in 1964". In reply the Passport Office regretted that they were unable to help him "as the papers on which passports were issued prior to 1966 are now destroyed".

On the surface now Scott was asking Bessell for very little: merely for some help with changing his name by deed poll from Josiffe to Scott, and perhaps for some advice about getting a new passport. But, ominously for Peter Bessell and Jeremy Thorpe, Scott had scribbled a postscript at the bottom of the last page: "I am coming to London on 2 May."

In fact he did not reach London on that date. He ended up reluctantly in the Portobello Nursing Home in Dublin. He was ill, but he could not afford to remain there. Ireland did not have a free National Health Service like the one in Britain.

Scott had now entered one of his sudden periods of nervous depression and felt he was in desperate need of kind and sympathetic medical attention. Eventually he made his way home to England. His spell in hospital, and the journey to London, had exhausted all the money he had saved for his trip to the United States.

Meanwhile in Parliament the Labour Government enjoyed a comfortable majority over the Opposition. In the 1966 General Election, Mr Wilson had trounced the Tories, ending up with an overall majority of 97, and with such overwhelming numbers at

their disposal in the House of Commons the Labour Administration introduced a wide spectrum of new and often controversial legislation. They also allowed Parliamentary time for a number of Bills which Private Members had been waiting to introduce and one of these was the Sexual Offences Bill which aimed at changing the law on homosexuality.

The Liberal Party helped to see this Bill through Parliament, but in political terms the summer of 1967 was not a happy time for the Liberals. Jeremy Thorpe had become leader in January that same year but there was no money to re-organise the party and the new leader was already attracting loud criticism from the Young Liberals. Elsewhere the more moderate sections of the party viewed his showman-like approach to revitalising the Liberals with apprehension.

For Norman Scott, the problems he faced in July 1967 were altogether more private. He became an out-patient at the psychiatric unit attached to St George's Hospital in the centre of London. There he consulted a psychiatrist called Brian O'Connell and told him how he had once been sent to an Approved School at Finchden Manor, near Tenterden in Kent, for stealing bales of hay for his pony.

Scott also told the psychiatrist about his private past. But the doctor heard his patient's claims in the privilege of his consulting room and kept the knowledge to himself.

On 14 July Scott wrote to Peter Bessell yet again, cataloguing events in his life and bemoaning the consequences, he said, of having met the man who was now the Liberal leader.

"I am truly sorry to write but I so need someone's help and you said long ago you would."

In Bessell's view, Norman Scott was now an even greater political danger than he had represented in 1962 when he had made his lengthy statement to the police.

As leader of his party, Jeremy Thorpe was now a national figure, a more important politician and therefore a more vulnerable target for any kind of attack.

The affair had also now transcended the level of one politician's private agony: even of the secret threat it posed to his own party. Jeremy Thorpe had become something of a risk to the Labour Government and the tiny handful of Ministers who knew about the confidential Scott file which was kept under lock and key at the Home Office.

Harold Wilson's Labour Government, after the General Election in 1966, no longer needed to seek Liberal votes in Parliament to help it remain in power. However, if the 1965 decision not to prosecute anybody were to become public, the ensuing criticism might well bring the Government down. After all, the Profumo affair, when the Conservative Junior Minister John Profumo was found to be consorting with a prostitute whose other clients included a Russian diplomat, had dealt a severe blow to Harold Macmillan's Tory Government in 1963, and here were the Labour side – who had rubbed their hands on that occasion – with their own skeleton in the cupboard.

Discretion and secrecy were essential to ensure that the affair would remain submerged. Yet when Scott wrote to Peter Bessell at the House of Commons he did not use much discretion. He was explicit about the most intimate details of his past life. In his letter of 14 July 1967 he told Bessell about "that first night in that house in Oxted".

Even if Scott intended no threat, the letters – and having the man loose in London – represented a danger more potent than if he were a common blackmailer. Bessell therefore seized on Scott's interest in going to America and offered to help him obtain a new passport. In the meantime he began the "retainer" letters which with their few pounds a week were designed to keep Scott happy but also to keep him away from the Ministry of Social Security (as it was called before the 1968 creation of the DHSS). If the young man poured out his troubles and explained why he had no Insurance cards, the embarrassment for the Liberal leader might well be grave.

Scott's new passport, number 300283, eventually arrived at Peter Bessell's office in Pall Mall in September 1967, and he hoped fervently that the model would now go abroad. They discussed building a new modelling career for him, even sending him on a trip to the Bahamas. But for the moment little came of these ideas.

After these new revelations, Penrose and Courtiour asked themselves whether there could have been further moments of intense political embarrassment at Westminster surrounding the Thorpe-Scott affair.

Peter Bessell had in fact told Penrose on the telephone that 1965 was not the only year in which he approached other Members of Parliament for help in protecting the Liberal leader.

And perhaps these approaches too might prove important because of their political overtones. If the Labour Government had been threatened once in its first year of office, could there have been other occasions when Jeremy Thorpe's problems had put it at risk?

The two reporters began a course of reminding themselves about the wider events taking place in the later 1960s.

The 1966 General Election, they saw, had given Harold Wilson a strong power-base in Parliament. Generally speaking, the country's economy was buoyant and there was relatively little unemployment.

In the past it had sometimes appeared that the Conservatives were the "natural ruling party" in Britain. But from the overwhelming proportions of the Labour Party's 1966 election triumph, there seemed a strong possibility that they might now take over that role, perhaps for a decade or more.

On 28 July 1965, the Conservative Party in Britain had tried to stem the drift towards the Left by modernising its public image. The party replaced the former Tory Prime Minister and leader Sir Alec Douglas-Home with the younger Edward Heath.

But the change of image had not succeeded. The 1966 election left the Conservatives with only 253 seats in Parliament, while Labour had 363.

Meanwhile, the third major political force, the Liberals, led by Jo Grimond, lost one of their previous seats in the election and ended up with 12 MPs. The Party's poor showing at the polls was soon translated into a growing disenchantment with Grimond and the consequent demand for a new and more energetic leader.

Once he had been elected leader in January 1967, Jeremy Thorpe saw himself as the great crusader who would repair his party's fortunes.

During the same period the party was short of money and short of resources to fight in the constituencies. There had been a noticeable decline in the number of active Liberal associations and lively supporters in the constituencies to help win new Parliamentary and local council seats. Money, or the lack of it, seemed to be the new leader's first problem.

"I remember Jeremy, who had been treasurer of the Party in the mid-sixties, talking endlessly about fund raising," said Bessell. "One of his dreams was that a wealthy Liberal supporter would die and leave all her money to the Liberals and he would then plan a

huge national campaign which would result in a massive revival of Party strength."

But if the Liberals lacked money, they did not lack advice on how best to become the party of power. Before Peter Hain became prominent, the militant Young Liberals were led by a young radical called Louis Eaks. Eaks wanted more left-wing policies for the party: Thorpe disagreed.

But there was one issue on which the Liberal Party was totally united: South Africa and the fight against Apartheid. Although Thorpe was strongly against the Liberal law-breakers who planned to sabotage cricket or rugby grounds where South African teams were playing, he was nonetheless no friend of the Pretoria regime.

Eaks however suddenly faced another kind of censure than the criticism of the Party leadership: he was charged and later found guilty at a London magistrates' court of indecent exposure. Penrose read the file of clippings about the case and thought it a strange coincidence that a militant Liberal like Eaks, fiercely critical of South Africa, should also have been found guilty of a well-publicised sexual offence: an incident which appeared to have put an immediate stop to his political ambitions. In the light of the Jeremy Thorpe and Peter Hain cases, which some people believed were part of a South African smear campaign, the manner of Eaks's downfall might well prove significant. It was tempting to think that he was perhaps an early victim of the so-called smear campaign.

But it was, of course, only very much later that the allegations of Norman Scott were to come out into the open.

In the late 1960s Norman Scott had no political interests and tended to stay well away from English political circles. When he was not involved personally, he said, he had no appetite for politics.

In the summer of 1968 Scott was living with a godson of Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper magnate. From his friend's fashionable address in Chester Square, Belgravia, he was given the occasional modelling job and planned a new modelling career. Peter Bessell had already agreed to pay £75 towards clothes and other items he needed and fortunately since fashion photographers often paid cash, he was able to survive for the moment without worrying unduly about Insurance cards.

With occasional well-paid fashion assignments, Scott now had a little money in his pocket. At least he could eat well and no longer had to rely on small handouts from Peter Bessell.

And in 1968 Scott met a girl called Susan Myers and on 13 May the following year they were married at the Kensington Register Office in London. Terry-Thomas, the film comedian, who was Sue's brother-in-law gave the happy couple a year's rent on a cottage at Milton Abbas, near Blandford in Dorset.

Sue Scott gave birth to a son, christened Diggory Benjamin, on 18 November 1969. But before the boy was born the model had again taken his problems back to Westminster. The prospect of being a family man brought with it new financial responsibilities.

"I got in contact with Mr Bessell in August 1969 about my Insurance cards. You see, without them," he explained to the two reporters, "the Social Security people would not pay my wife any maternity benefits."

When he got through to Peter Bessell at the House of Commons on the afternoon of 27 August, Scott emphasised that his situation was worsening daily. The baby would be born in a matter of weeks. He and his wife were so short of money that he had even resorted to eating vegetables which he took from nearby fields.

From his account to Penrose, it seemed clear that during this period, as well as being close to starving, Scott was also under considerable pressure from his wife to pull himself together and straighten out their financial affairs. Their marriage had had a disjointed quality from the start, with Susan continuing to earn money for as long as possible during her pregnancy by staying on in her job at the Tate Gallery in London. This meant that for part of the first three months she had been living separately from Norman.

The "cottage" at Milton Abbas for which Terry-Thomas and his wife were paying the rent was in fact one of a pair of gatehouses belonging to a mansion. Scott's tastes and expectations would have been more suited to living in the former mansion itself.

At this juncture, Jeremy Thorpe's good fortune was interpreted by Scott as a mocking counterpart to his family's straitened circumstances. Scott had already failed to obtain any financial help by applying to two Social Security offices, so they felt entitled to expect further help from the MP. The understanding that they should deal with Jeremy Thorpe only via Peter Bessell was not of Scott's making, and Bessell, in Scott's view, now seemed to have let them down.

"I think Sue phoned first," said Scott. "She spoke to a man and he said Jeremy was not in. But I think it was Jeremy who answered the telephone."

Later that evening Scott himself phoned the Cobbaton number in North Devon. "I spoke with Caroline," he said.

Caroline listened patiently, according to Scott. He asked her to intercede with her husband about the Insurance cards.

"I told Caroline that Sue and I were starving and had no money. I said: 'We have a baby due and you have just had a baby. Please help us.' But she then said: 'I don't want to know anything about it. It's disgusting.' Perhaps she said 'nauseous'. That was that."

In the heat and desperation of that afternoon Scott had also attempted to take matters into his own hands in another way. Peter Bessell had just assured him on the telephone that he had spoken to the Minister of State, David Ennals, about his Insurance cards, so Scott picked up the phone again and tried to reach Ennals in person at the Department of Health and Social Security. The call was eventually taken by the Minister's Private Secretary, Kenneth Marshall.

Penrose later called Marshall and asked the civil servant if he remembered the conversation he once had with Norman Scott in 1969. Rather startled at first by being approached, the government official agreed that out of the many thousands of individual cases he had dealt with over the years he did faintly recall the special circumstances surrounding the Scott affair. He had looked into the background of the case for his Minister, David Ennals: that would have been part of his responsibilities as Private Secretary. But the discreet senior civil servant would not elaborate on what he meant by "special circumstances".

For Peter Bessell at least, the circumstances surrounding Norman Scott's telephone call to him that summer afternoon were so special that they amounted to a nerve-racking crisis. The MP for Bodmin was suffering from ever increasing pressures in his business life which involved frequent trips abroad, particularly to the United States. The need to help Scott and prevent a political scandal nevertheless still rested on his shoulders and the only way to settle this problem was to regularise Scott's National Insurance position in some way.

For Bessell it was an accepted fact that Jeremy Thorpe had agreed to act as Scott's employer during the time that the two men were friendly with each other. That meant that in law Thorpe would have had to purchase an Insurance Stamp for Scott each week, just as he did for his secretary and any other employee. The stamped card would then constitute proof of Scott's entitlement to

Insurance benefits, and proof that his employer had fulfilled his legal obligations. Bessell knew that one or two of Scott's cards for the years he was friendly with Jeremy Thorpe had been stamped. But it was not until March 1977 that Scott succeeded in obtaining written confirmation of this from a DHSS office outside London. In 1969 Bessell simply hoped to solve Scott's problem by using the normal channels open to any MP.

But to his horror his approaches to the DHSS had the opposite effect to what he intended. The DHSS, reacting on regulation lines, considered suing the model for non-payment of Insurance contributions. If this had happened it would have been an unmitigated disaster. Scott was naive enough to blurt out his whole story in court.

Bessell explained on the telephone his apparent foolishness at length: "I didn't realise until too late that I'd done something dangerous, in the sense of going to the Ministry. All I was concerned about was to get credit for the cards which had been lost."

According to Scott, Jeremy Thorpe had apparently mislaid his 1963/4 Insurance cards. This appeared to fit Bessell's and Scott's explanation for the later "retainers" which were a kind of substitute for the benefits that Scott might have claimed if his Insurance cards had been in order.

Bessell claimed that he was at the time near to panic at this sudden turn of events. The situation was further complicated by pathetic appeals which Scott was making to him at the end of that summer in 1969. He had, he admitted, made a bad mistake in drawing the DHSS's attention to the contributions which the Liberal leader had paid as Scott's employer at various times from 1961 to 1963. Apart from the rumours this might have caused inside the government department, there was also the risk of such information leaking to the Press and the outside world. Indeed in November 1969 Scott mentioned in an interview at the DHSS that he would give his story to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. There might then be speculation about why Thorpe appeared to have employed Scott in the first place and in what capacity.

Questions might also be asked about why Scott's National Insurance cards were only partially stamped and up to date. It was not clear whether Thorpe too had possibly contravened the regulations over the cards and might himself be prosecuted. A trivial matter had become loaded over the years with dire consequences for all concerned.

"It had not occurred to me," said Peter Bessell, "that at some point someone at the DHSS would ask me who was supposed to have stamped the cards in the first place." But he realised his mistake as soon as he saw how the DHSS was proposing to proceed, and then approached his colleague in the House of Commons, David Ennals. Ennals was a Minister of State at the DHSS: surely, Bessell felt, he would help in the tricky circumstances? The two politicians had something in common in their political outlook: both were moderate radicals, although Ennals was Labour and Bessell Liberal. Ennals too was a President of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and a strong critic of South Africa.

The first difficulty was that Scott was not Bessell's constituent and therefore the MP had to explain to the Minister of State why it was that he and not Scott's own MP was approaching him about this problem. He had to make it perfectly clear that the matter was complicated by the fact that Jeremy Thorpe was involved.

"David Ennals told me he would look into the matter for me as soon as possible," Bessell claimed. "We had correspondence on the subject." The reporters knew that fact already since Scott had kept some of the letters and passed copies over to them.

By 27 August, however, David Ennals had not actually taken the steps that would put Bessell out of his misery. So when Norman Scott came on the telephone with his mixture of pleas, complaints and hysterical threats, the MP was provoked by his seemingly ungrateful behaviour. He was also very worried indeed. Scott made matters worse by slamming down the telephone. Bessell then sat down and immediately dictated a letter. Normally he would address his letters "Dear Norman" but on this occasion he began more formally; perhaps in response to being put on the spot by Scott, or perhaps because he sensed that this document might find its way into official files:

HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON, S.W.1.

27th August 1969

Dear Mr Scott,

Further to our telephone conversation this afternoon, we appeared to be cut off. I can understand your feelings and your anxieties, and I wish very much that you would believe



that I am anxious to do all in my power to help you.

Regarding your cards, I know your anxiety about this. I have done all in my power to hurry matters along, but miracles cannot be achieved in five minutes and it will take all the tact and persuasion of which I am capable to arrange for a card to be issued to you, properly franked, so that you can obtain benefit for your wife during her period of confinement. It would be a great mistake if you jeopardised this in the way you suggested to me on the telephone, and I hope, for your own sake, and in spite of your anxiety, you will accept my advice and guidance.

I have spoken to Jeremy Thorpe and put him in the picture regarding the present position.

The letter provided a lifeline for Scott at which he clutched, even if he did not go so far as to haul himself along it. He called the DHSS office at Weymouth. "We certainly had no money to go there ourselves," he said.

When he located the man who had taken the call, Penrose thought it remarkable that the retired manager of a Social Security office who had once dealt with numerous cases every day, should, like Kenneth Marshall, also remember the Scott case. Again this seemed to be a reflection of the "special circumstances".

"Oh I remember Mr Scott phoning me at Weymouth," said Kenneth Hill. "He was obviously agitated and began telling me all manner of extraordinary tales about Mr Thorpe and the Liberal party." Mr Hill also received a direct call from Peter Bessell.

Scott had received a letter from Kenneth Marshall at the DHSS, dated 20 August 1969. He wrote: "I can now confirm that Mr Bessell has contacted my Minister and that the matter is being looked into. You will be hearing further in due course, probably from the Department's local office."

Mr Hill remembered how he quickly sent off one of his most experienced officers to see Scott and his wife at their cottage at Milton Abbas, some twenty miles north of Weymouth.

Scott said: "He came to see us twice and I'm fairly certain he

gave us money on the spot. Each time it was £15 I think. But I do remember telling him *everything* about what had occurred in the past. I left nothing out.

"I told him that Sue needed maternity benefits too," Scott said. "And they came through the post shortly afterwards. The whole affair seemed so bizarre. I mean a DHSS man actually *bringing* us money suddenly: normally they have a reputation for being so slow."

For the moment, therefore, the Department of Social Security's stop-gap solution to the Scotts' financial problems had worked. But something more permanent was still needed. By the autumn of 1969 Susan and Norman Scott found themselves back in London, living for a few weeks, with their new baby son, at a flat they rented in Earl's Court Square.

With a wife to support and no job, Scott was again in serious financial straits. In November he and his wife went along to a London branch of the DHSS.

Hyman Forman was an assistant manager at Charles House in Kensington in 1969. He too told Penrose that he remembered Norman Scott and his wife extremely well. He had listened patiently, if sceptically, as Scott told him about the events which he said had occurred since 1960. He had examined Scott's personal collection of letters and documents and made arrangements for his department to have them photocopied.

Shortly afterwards an official had arrived at the Scotts' flat and told the couple they would receive £15 a week in benefits to live on.

On 28 November, the DHSS sent Scott a letter from Waterford House in London: it said that Scott would not be pressed to make Insurance contributions for the period 3 September 1962 to 31 August 1969. There was no mention whatsoever of the payments which had been made earlier and their implications. The letter referred to "the particular circumstances of your case".

"Perhaps there was no point in taking Scott to court in 1969?" said Courtiour, looking at this letter and seeking an explanation. "I mean, what would the DHSS get out of a successful prosecution? Scott had no money to pay any fine." It was one way of rationalising the decision, but if the answer was so obvious, why had it required the personal involvement of the Minister?

There were other letters in their growing file about Norman Scott. On 21 January 1970 David Ennals himself wrote to Peter

Bessell about the Norman Scott case. Beginning "Dear Peter", the Minister of State pointed to a possible short-term solution to Scott's financial problem. In the last paragraph he said: "Under the Ministry of Social Security Act a person who is below pensionable age and unable to work is entitled to claim a Supplementary Allowance to bring his other income, if any, up to the level of his requirements as laid down in the Act. This benefit is not subject to national insurance contributions in any way."

For Bessell this letter from the Minister was encouraging. There was no suggestion that Scott might be prosecuted and it now seemed unlikely that the DHSS would bring any action against the Liberal leader. Bessell at once dictated a letter to Scott: it made clear what the MP had urgently striven to bring about: "The Minister has agreed to waive any right of legal action he may have in this matter."

Seven years later, Penrose asked Bessell on the trans-Atlantic telephone what David Ennals had really achieved for him.

"I assumed he saw to it, or somebody did, that there was no prosecution over Scott's lost cards. Jeremy had the cards and had agreed to stamp them. Therefore he was in a sense calling himself Scott's employer. And since he did not send in a stamped card, Jeremy really had the responsibility to do so.

"I had to be quite frank to Ennals about it. I said to him: 'Now the reason that the cards are missing is because Jeremy had the cards which Scott gave to him for stamping.' Ennals could have said: 'In that case Jeremy is responsible for stamping them in full and we ought to look to Jeremy for that.' But he didn't."

In these few words, Peter Bessell summed up what had been yet another traumatic experience.

The growing number of politicians and officials involved in the Thorpe-Scott affair moved on into the 1970s not knowing what had been the ironic and frivolous outcome of all their strenuous efforts behind the scenes which had now involved yet another Minister of the Crown: Sue Scott had gone straight out with the first instalment of her maternity benefit and bought an embroidered Indian dress and twelve peacock feathers.

## Chapter 14

From the point of view of the politicians involved the latest Norman Scott problem had at last been settled with the help of a Government Minister. But Scott was still clearly in a dangerous mood, and this was particularly worrying since 1970 was due to be an election year. The Liberal leader was convinced that Scott would use the election period to embarrass him publicly, imagining that his one-time friend might arrive without warning at one of his pre-election hustings and then shout out his allegations.

As the summer approached Harold Wilson decided on a June election, and polling day was set for 18 June. This was an odd choice, first because it surprised many of his Labour colleagues who were expecting him to hold on until the autumn; and secondly because 18 June also happened to be the opening day of the first Test Match between England and South Africa at Lords cricket ground.

It was not just that the average Englishman was so obsessed with cricket that he would fail to go out and vote. But one of the issues of the election was "law and order" and after the anti-Apartheid demonstrations which had disturbed the tour of the South African rugby team the previous winter, the police were again preparing for trouble.

Jeremy Thorpe too had much to fear from the fact that many Young Liberals, led by their Chairman, Peter Hain, were strongly in favour of disrupting the South African cricket tour.

For someone who was known as a shrewd fighter who knew every trick of the game, Mr Wilson seemed to have put himself and his friends in an unnecessarily difficult position. And he took what in retrospect might be considered unusual measures to cancel out his mistake. At other times when the British Labour Government had come under attack from black African regimes for participating with white South Africa on the sportsfield, Harold Wilson had officially maintained that he had no control over what was done by private British teams. He would take the line – as he did on other issues such as the recruitment of British mercenaries

by right-wing African forces – that the Government was powerless to intervene. However, on this occasion he broke that useful principle.

On 19 May the Cricket Council at Lords had decided by a large majority that the South African tour would go on. The following day the Home Secretary, James Callaghan, had a meeting with Mr Wilson. On Thursday 21 May, the Home Secretary then asked the Cricket Council on behalf of the Government to cancel the tour “on the grounds of broad public policy”.

From the way Mr Wilson had diverted attention onto the party-political aspects of his action, Penrose and Courtiour suspected that he might be avoiding a more important issue. Perhaps their opinions were now unduly influenced by what they had heard of the way politicians had helped Parliamentary colleagues out of personal difficulties during the 1960s.

. But what was it in 1970 that had continued to worry them apart from the mere continuing presence of a belligerent and unpredictable Norman Scott? There was no single answer to this question but one incident which Penrose and Courtiour heard about showed what a tinderbox situation existed by this time at Westminster.

In the fortnight before the 1970 General Election a man telephoned Peter Bessell at the House of Commons saying that he wanted to talk about the Scott affair and the damaging effect it had had on Sue Scott’s marriage.

The man, who gave his name as Hetherington, claimed that he had letters and that he intended distributing photocopies of these in Bessell’s constituency. The MP was alarmed. Although he had decided against standing in the election himself, he had thrown his weight behind the new Liberal candidate for the Bodmin constituency. Such letters could ruin the new candidate’s chances in Bodmin and the political damage would very quickly spread. Bessell arranged to meet Hetherington on Sunday 14 June 1970, four days before election day itself.

But before that Bessell recalled, “I telephoned Jeremy and without going into details said there was a problem in connection with Scott. He arranged to come to discuss the matter with me.”

Once again Bessell assured his friend that he could handle the problem. He was confident that Hetherington could be made to hold his tongue and hand over any sensitive documents which

might have fallen into his possession. If he turned out to be a common blackmailer, Bessell could deal with him accordingly.

In Bessell’s view, Hetherington appeared to believe that the MP for Bodmin might help him with his scheme to bring down the Liberal Party. Bessell said he exploited this belief by offering to help Hetherington photocopy his documents at the Liberal offices in Liskeard after party workers had left for the night.

“If I had obtained them I would never have returned them to him.”

When Hetherington and Bessell met, Hetherington opened a small briefcase to hand over three quarto-sized letters. Two of the letters were quite short, while the third covered most of a page.

Bessell became suspicious. “The writing appeared to be Jeremy’s, but even in the poor light I sensed at once there was something wrong with them,” he explained. “For one thing, the letters were far too legible and Jeremy’s writing was hard to read. And Jeremy had a tendency to leave a very wide margin to one side of the page.” Bessell was convinced that the letters were forgeries, but he kept his suspicions to himself for the time being.

Hetherington also had a written resumé of the nature of the Liberal leader’s friendship with Norman Scott. For a moment Bessell believed that Hetherington might possibly have been hired by a private group of Liberal supporters opposed to Jeremy Thorpe’s leadership. But Hetherington seemed to have money on his mind. If he had been hired by someone, he was at the same time also a blackmailer. He said the documents were worth £5,000. Bessell said that Liberals did not have that sort of money and the best anyone could hope to get was £2,000, to which Hetherington agreed.

“I remember I replied: ‘You have got a deal, Mr Hetherington,’” said Bessell. “The thought in my mind was whether he had been put up to it by Scott. I asked Hetherington how well he knew Scott and he said he had only met him a couple of times. I said something like: Scott was an unpleasant character and that I never trusted blond men. He replied, putting his hand to his head, that he was once fair himself.”

Bessell had wanted to find out if Hetherington had ever met Scott and so he had set this simple trap: “I knew then that he had never met Scott whose hair was black.”

Bessell then took out about £175 from his own briefcase. The cash, Bessell explained, was to cover incidental expenses during

the election campaign. He handed this money to Hetherington who grinned nervously and passed over the envelope containing the letters and the resumé.

According to Bessell, he then walked over to a uniformed policeman who was standing nearby. He knew he had paid Hetherington much less than would satisfy him, but wanted to give the man the impression that he was bringing in the police in a case of attempted blackmail. Hetherington raced off.

For Bessell his midnight mission with Hetherington had been successful. He had gained possession of the letters, even if they were forgeries, for £175. Another danger had apparently been averted.

However, the Scott problem had spread into other areas at this time. The Liberal leader and his friends were fighting not only a General Election, but a Hydra-like threat which could be repulsed temporarily, but never stopped dead in its tracks. Each time the politicians hacked off a head as they had with the Hetherington affair, the monster would rise up again and show signs of ominous movement elsewhere.

By early 1970 Susan Scott had already gone through enormous financial and emotional difficulties with her husband. And again she had telephoned Caroline Thorpe to pour out her troubles.

To the Thorpes and to anyone else who knew the couple, it was clear that the Scotts' marriage was unlikely to last. And in fact Sue began divorce proceedings in earnest during May, filing a petition, naming two young men.

However the Thorpes certainly found themselves with no time for brooding on the Scott problem in June 1970. As soon as Harold Wilson announced the election, they were plunged into a period of feverish activity.

In the event Harold Wilson had succeeded in stopping the South African cricket tour, but he still went on to lose the election. The Tories had an overall majority of 43 and Edward Heath became Britain's new Prime Minister.

Jeremy Thorpe emerged from the General Election with only 6 Liberal seats in the House of Commons, and his own majority in his constituency had slumped to an embarrassing 369 votes over his Conservative opponent, Timothy Keigwin, a local Devon farmer. It was a bitterly disappointing end to all the Liberal leader's grandiose hopes.

After the election a tired Jeremy Thorpe travelled up to London

by train, along with his young son, Rupert, and prepared to face the inevitable storm of criticism from his depleted party. Caroline was to follow on to London by car. Her husband's presence was expected in the House of Commons during the customary tributes to the re-appointed Speaker, Dr Horace King.

Mr Thorpe was waiting to add his speech to the occasion when the urgent message reached him: that his wife's car had been involved in a serious accident.

The MP set off at once for the hospital to which Caroline had been taken. But it was already too late.

On the day of his wife's death, Jeremy Thorpe was driven home from the hospital to their empty cottage in Devon. And as night fell, one of the first of several hundred letters of condolence arrived – it was from Harold Wilson, now the Leader of the Opposition at Westminster. Mr Thorpe was touched, even in his grief. A despatch rider had brought the letter all the way from London, and from a politician who was not known for being flamboyant in style he regarded this as the gesture of a friend.

"After Caroline died," Thorpe told a journalist four years later, "I forgot about the electoral disaster. It just blurred. I suppose that for a year, while I did everything I had to do – took Party meetings, did my constituency work, laid the wreath on the Cenotaph – I did it mechanically."

Something else which Jeremy Thorpe managed to do, according to Peter Bessell, was to keep an eye on how Norman Scott's divorce was progressing. When it was time to do something positive, he alerted Peter Bessell who wrote to Scott on 29 October 1970.

"I have heard indirectly of your problem," he said, "and I am very sorry indeed to know of these troubles."

Bessell told Penrose in one of their regular trans-Atlantic telephone conversations that the first priority was to keep Scott well away from any divorce proceedings, again because of the dangers that would arise if he spoke out in court. Bessell suggested to Scott that he should engage Leonard Ross, who was Bessell's own lawyer and who handled many of his business affairs.

In fact, Scott had received a letter from his wife's lawyers in June telling him of her wish for a divorce, and he had approached a London firm of solicitors called How Davey and Lewis, who had offices a short distance away from his flat at Earl's Court Square. With their advice he had at first decided to contest the divorce on

the legal grounds that his wife had deserted him and taken away their baby son Benjamin.

Scott told Penrose that the only reason he switched lawyers was because of Bessell's idea that he should use Leonard Ross. He suspected that he was being manipulated but he had a basic trust in Bessell.

To make sure that a divorce did not provide an opportunity for an outburst in court from Scott, Bessell consulted Leonard Ross. In the privileged confidentiality that exists between a lawyer and his client, he spoke about the Liberal leader's friendship with Norman Scott several years before.

Penrose and Courtiour realised that they too needed to talk with Leonard Ross about Scott's divorce case but the solicitor had clearly felt professionally that he should not make any comment about the Scott divorce case when the clamour over Scott's allegations had been at its noisiest in the Press.

Penrose had got through to the lawyer once on the telephone, but the conversation had been short. Ross had nothing to say. Courtiour then called Ross in the first week of October 1976. A secretary asked guardedly what he wanted to discuss with Mr Ross and he replied simply: "A divorce." The girl relaxed and made an appointment for 8 October.

Just before midday, the two reporters were ushered into Leonard Ross's office in central London.

"You wanted to speak with me about a divorce, I understand?" enquired the lawyer, sitting down behind his desk.

"Yes," replied Courtiour. "Norman Scott's divorce in 1971."

Ross, understandably, looked surprised.

"I feel, frankly, that I am being hounded by the Press," said Ross. "My involvement in this thing was very small."

Penrose asked him how precisely he had first become involved.

"Peter Bessell said: 'I have a friend who needs help on a divorce.' I was delighted to help. We had a small practice and Bessell was a good customer."

But the lawyer did not contest the basic fact: Bessell had hired him to look after Norman Scott's divorce case.

Courtior wondered if he had been worried about the apparent conflict of interests?

"It was obvious to me that Bessell did not want Thorpe's name mentioned in divorce proceedings. But I acted in Mr Scott's interests," said Ross emphatically. "There was no cover-up . . .

Whatever I am, I am a lawyer and have been for twenty years. I would never do anything improper. There was no question of shutting Scott up. Scott told me of his alleged relationship with Thorpe and I said to him that it was irrelevant."

Ross stressed too that he had no connection with South Africa or BOSS agents. In fact, he was a member of the Barnet Liberal Club.

When Leonard Ross met Scott in his London office the lawyer constantly reminded him that events which had occurred before he had married Sue were irrelevant to the divorce proceedings. But Scott was not convinced.

He felt Jeremy Thorpe had contributed to the breakdown of his marriage with Sue. He wanted the court to know the full facts of the case, not just that his marriage had been difficult, as he was anxious about future access to his son.

But Leonard Ross continued to argue this point and others with his client. In a letter to Scott on 19 April the lawyer asked:

"How, for example, can your relationship with J.T. affect that issue?"

After this Scott became truculent. He had tended to trust that Bessell really was looking after his interests at such a calamitous moment in his life, but now he became doubtful. On 13 January 1971, Leonard Ross sent him a letter which made the position clear. The solicitor began: "I note your instructions that you wish me to defend any petition which will be brought by your wife against you and that you wish me to apply for access to the children." But the last paragraph of the letter said: "There has been some talk of your costs being paid by those who are interested in your future but this is obviously a decision which you would like to make yourself."

At the beginning of 1971 Peter Bessell was commuting between London and his business offices in New York. But even 3,000 miles away in America he kept a careful eye on the situation. He explained to Penrose and Courtiour how tricky it had become.

"I believed that Leonard Ross could handle the problem which had arisen over Scott's divorce case," he said. "Scott could be kept out of court or at least if he couldn't be kept out of court, he could be persuaded not to open his mouth."

"The logical argument was that if Scott wanted access to his son Benjamin the best way of ensuring that he wouldn't get access would be to get up in court and make an outburst. Then he would

be claiming he was a homosexual and the court would not like that in a custody of a child case. So I was satisfied that there was no great danger there."

David Holmes, a former Deputy Treasurer of the Liberal Party, also knew about the Norman Scott threat. Holmes had been the best man at Thorpe's wedding to Caroline Allpass and, like Bessell, was equally keen to shield the politician.

Holmes, a merchant banker in Manchester in 1971, also visited the United States regularly. In January that year he met Peter Bessell in New York for lunch. The two men discussed in detail the various alternatives open to them in dealing with the Scott problem. According to Scott it was at this time that Bessell offered him a trip to the United States. Or if he failed to arrange a work permit for Scott to stay in America, he could have a holiday in the Bahamas instead.

But Scott turned down any such offers, choosing instead to move to a village in North Wales called Tal-y-Bont.

Bessell sent Scott £25 through Leonard Ross and was satisfied that he was out of London and living a considerable distance from Lincoln, where the divorce case was to be heard that summer.

In the end Scott also decided to move away from Ross. "I felt Leonard Ross wasn't working for me, he was working for *them*," he said. He turned to a firm of solicitors in Liverpool and then to a lawyer called John Bellis, who had a practice at Penmaenmawr in North Wales.

The outcome was that Scott did not attend the divorce hearings and was not represented at the Lincoln Divorce Courts. In fact Leonard Ross told Penrose that he twice spoke with the Liberal leader to assure him that his friendship with Scott would not be mentioned in court. Sue Scott was granted her divorce on the grounds of her husband's adultery.

From California Peter Bessell told Penrose on the telephone that Leonard Ross had asked him to pay the £70 bill for Scott's divorce in 1971. And then in a later letter, sent to his office in New York, had urged him to pay it or get his friend the Liberal leader to pay the outstanding account.

"In the end I think Jeremy did say he'd paid the bill for Scott's divorce," said Bessell thoughtfully. "In fact, I'm sure he did."

But had Jeremy Thorpe eventually paid towards the cost of Norman Scott's divorce? Penrose called Leonard Ross again at his office and asked him.

Ross told the reporter candidly that he had done a considerable amount of work. "But you must understand that it wasn't the amount of money involved, which was relatively small. It was really the principle involved in the matter."

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the principle, the outcome for the three Liberal Party members had been successful. Ross told Penrose he did eventually get a cheque for about £70 from Mr Thorpe.

For the two MPs another crisis had been averted and the model had again been kept out of court. Yet for Norman Scott the assistance arranged for him had been anything but successful. Sue Scott had been granted her divorce petition and obtained custody of Benjamin and the father was allowed to see his child for the meagre total of eight hours in each year. If he tried to see his son at any other time he would be breaking the law.

## Chapter 15

At this stage in their investigations, Penrose and Courtiour began to notice how great an influence Scott's love of animals had had on the story. The most dramatic occasion was, of course, when his dog Rinka was shot by the airline pilot four years after his divorce. But the same affection seemed to have influenced the turn of events from very early on in his life and to have had a bearing on his dealings with other people. Animals, in terms of his psychology, almost became a substitute for people.

The reporters were haunted by a particular enigmatic phrase at the end of one of Jeremy Thorpe's affectionate letters to Norman: "Bunnies *can* and *will* go to France." There was the nickname "Bunny" which Scott said Jeremy had given him. Scott alleged Thorpe had referred to him as "a frightened rabbit". Scott explained to Penrose that Jeremy Thorpe had had some idea of sending him over to France on a course involving the schooling of horses. But in fact he had never gone.

Now, during the preparations for Scott's divorce at the beginning of 1971, it had been the same situation. Bessell had worked on a scheme for putting their problem out of the way but, nominally because of an animal, it had not worked properly. The suggestion that Scott should go to the Bahamas had fallen through because of his attachment to his whippet Emma: under British quarantine regulations he would of course have been separated from her for six months on their return. Instead in February of 1971 he had moved to the Welsh village of Tal-y-Bont near Conway where, for £12 a week, he rented a house which he had seen advertised in the *Times*.

Scott had no hesitation about agreeing to pay the rent on the house. After all, Peter Bessell had promised to help him financially. Before he left London the owner of his flat in Earl's Court Square had also paid him £1,500 to relinquish his tenancy.

With money in his pocket the model was able to plan his new life in Tal-y-Bont. When he arrived in March, he was accompanied by a newly acquired Afghan hound named Apple, his two whippets

Emma and Kate, and a cat. Two friends, Stella Levy and a Belgian diamond dealer from Antwerp called Paul Gennard, helped him set up home.

There were other reasons why Scott could afford to be optimistic about the future. Peter Bessell had offered him, in place of the cruise to the West Indies, a sum of money to enable him to rent stables and buy horses.

Scott said "Jeremy had apparently agreed he did have a moral responsibility towards me. Mr Bessell then asked me how much I would need to start a new life. I said that all I really wanted was my Insurance cards sorted out: the usual request I made."

But Bessell made it clear that he was prepared to be more generous. Scott told Bessell that a few hundred pounds would help him rent some stables and begin schooling horses for a living in Tal-y-Bont. But Bessell replied that £5,000 could be made available.

"I was staggered," said Scott, surprise still showing in his voice years later. "Mr Bessell said he'd be in touch with me."

Whatever the motives that led Bessell to offer Norman Scott £5,000, Courtiour and Penrose had no reason to disbelieve that the offer had been made. Two sceptical villagers in Tal-y-Bont had witnessed a telephone conversation between Scott and Bessell, and in fact, one of the two, A. W. K. Rose, the proprietor of the village garage, signed a statement confirming what he had heard:

May 23rd, 1971

### *To Whom it may concern*

In March of this year Mr Norman Scott asked me if he could use the telephone in my premises. This he did and asked me if I would listen to the conversation – he was speaking to a Mr Peter Bessell in London.

I did not hear all of the conversation but did hear Mr Bessell tell Mr Scott that all that they could raise was £5,000 – but in addition to this they would pay for the rent of the Mill House here in Tal-y-Bont. Mr Scott then asked for some money to be able to live here – Mr Bessell said that he would send some money – and would leave instructions with his secretary to this effect, as he was very busy and was going to America very shortly.

Mr Bernard Davies, who works with me was witness to me listening to this conversation.



Norman Scott was naturally delighted at the prospect of getting £5,000 to begin a new life. However, within a matter of days he was to receive a letter dictated by Peter Bessell which poured cold water<sup>3</sup> over his raised expectations.

Dear Norman,

I am so sorry I have not been able to raise the money you requested before going away on urgent business to the United States. However, I will hope to see you when I return. Meanwhile, please keep in touch with Mr Ross.

Scott was not only disappointed that Peter Bessell's promises had come to little, he was also furious. And he got a sympathetic hearing in Tal-y-Bont. Some of the villagers were deeply shocked by the story the model told and offered to take up the matter on his behalf. On 4 May 1971 the garage proprietor wrote directly to the Liberal leader at the House of Commons. Having made it clear that Scott had told him the full story of his alleged relationship, and of Bessell's financial offer, Rose finished by writing: "Mr Scott's financial situation is now critical. He is not without friends who are willing to help him, but obviously the situation must be resolved. It must surely be in your own interests to resolve it.

"We have nothing whatsoever to gain from this whole sorry business, or the knowledge of it. We should simply like to see Mr Scott settled into a reasonable way of life when he so obviously wishes this for himself."

If Thorpe did not know already, this letter made it clear that Scott was still talking freely about their past. The letter made it impossible to deny that he knew what Peter Bessell was doing and saying on his behalf, but Thorpe replied via his personal assistant at the House of Commons, Tom Dale, the letter which Scott had shown the two reporters at their first meeting:

"As far as he is aware he does not know Mr Norman Scott. However, he believes that Mr Van de Breck de Vater knew a Mr Norman Josiffe who may be the same person.

"Mr Thorpe asks me to say that he is under no obligation to this gentleman."

Penrose and Courtiour discussed the impact of this letter. They could quite understand why it had infuriated Scott when Keith Rose showed it to him.

Again the allegation of blackmail was to be considered. Was the

Liberal Party simply taking Lord Stow Hill's advice and "treating the fellow rough"? In discussing a sum like £5,000, both Peter Bessell and Norman Scott did seem to be skating very close to the blackmail area: or would some people see it more as a question of buying Scott off?

In the meantime, Peter Bessell had returned from his business trip to America.

Bessell told Penrose on the telephone from California that by this time he was becoming thoroughly tired of the Scott affair. But he still felt deeply sympathetic towards Jeremy and could not abandon his friend at such a fraught moment in his political career.

On some occasions, however, he did not seem to make the best decisions in his constant fight to protect Jeremy Thorpe. For example, after telling Scott in March that he would help with the rent for his house in Tal-y-Bont, he later changed his mind.

Scott was turned out of his house and turned in desperation to the former postmistress of Tal-y-Bont, a widow called Gwen Parry-Jones. Soon he was telling her about his problems, and a situation arose which might never have come about if Bessell had paid Scott's rent as originally promised.

Gwen Parry-Jones offered her new friend not only accommodation but also some practical advice and a piece of enterprising assistance. She believed passionately that the ex-model had been unfairly treated and that this had been responsible for his ill-health, bouts of depression and general unhappiness. So she decided to write to the Welsh Liberal MP and barrister, Emlyn Hooson. Her letter hinted strongly that a "Liberal MP" at Westminster had behaved disgracefully in the past and that she wanted the matter thoroughly investigated.

On 19 May 1971, Emlyn Hooson replied from the House of Commons, inviting her, in view of her "serious hints", to visit him to provide him with "greater details and some evidence".

From Gwen Parry-Jones's letter Emlyn Hooson had somehow formed the impression that it was Peter Bessell and not Jeremy Thorpe, who was being accused of improper behaviour in the past. The misunderstanding no doubt arose because of the prominent part played by Bessell's lengthy correspondence with Scott, a factor which the postmistress had mentioned in her letter.

The Welsh widow had certainly startled the MP for Montgomery. And even though Peter Bessell was no longer an MP, Hooson decided he could not ignore what he had been told. Mrs

Parry-Jones's letter was not only a reflection on a prominent Liberal but also on the Liberal Party itself.

When Penrose and Courtiour visited Emlyn Hooson in his room<sup>3</sup> at the House of Commons, the MP carefully went over the events which had followed:

"In her letter," he began, "Mrs Parry-Jones said that a young man living near her had been caused great unhappiness by a leading figure within the Liberal Party. It was agreed she would come to London and I mentioned the matter to David Steel, then the Party's Chief Whip at Westminster."

Emlyn Hooson was not altogether surprised about the allegations which he at first mistakenly believed were being made against the former MP for Bodmin. "In some ways I found Bessell an odd fish," he confided in his quiet voice. "He had changed since entering the House of Commons and the charges against him did not seem exactly implausible."

On Wednesday 26 May, Gwen Parry-Jones arrived in London. Accompanied by Norman Scott, she went straight to the House of Commons where she wanted to discuss the whole matter with Emlyn Hooson. But on that particular day the MP had been called away to a legal conference and was not in the Houses of Parliament to hear their extraordinary story. It was Hooson's secretary, Helen Roberts, who met the couple. She knew something about them from the correspondence she had typed for her employer and she decided to take them to see the young Liberal Chief Whip, David Steel. The party's Chief Whip, she felt, would know how to handle what was clearly a delicate situation.

In David Steel's room in the House of Commons, Scott nervously told his story. The MP and Helen Roberts listened with baffled incredulity. Gwen Parry-Jones sat quietly, saying little. David Steel had expected to hear allegations against Peter Bessell and certainly not against Jeremy Thorpe, his Party's respected leader. Thorpe had helped him a great deal since he had entered Parliament in 1964 and he was widely regarded in political circles as his protégé.

Steel began flicking through the file of letters and documents which Scott had collected over the years. He looked across at Gwen Parry-Jones who confirmed parts of the story which she knew.

"Mrs Parry-Jones appeared to be an eminently sensible person, a reasonable lady who had no personal axe to grind," Steel told

Courtior and Penrose. "I thought Norman Scott was rather strange. He had either been on the edge of, or had just had, a nervous breakdown."

Eventually Steel's angry scepticism was transformed into genuine confusion. The politician did not quite know what to believe. Scott's claims seemed preposterous, but he could not understand why Peter Bessell had been paying the model small sums of money. And what was the explanation for the strange conversation between Scott and Bessell which the Welsh garage owner had witnessed on the telephone in Tal-y-Bont? According to Scott, Steel suggested that they should all have a glass of whisky in the circumstances.

"In the end Mr Steel said: 'Jeremy will have to go! We'll have to meet him at the airport when he comes back from Africa.' I remember Helen Roberts making hurried notes in a pad," said Scott, "she seemed overwhelmed by what had been said."

When Penrose called Helen Roberts at the Commons she agreed that she had been flustered when Norman Scott had made his allegations. "Even now, several years later, I find it difficult to talk about the subject," she said shyly.

The following day, 27 May, Scott returned to the House of Commons alone. Emlyn Hooson was now back in London and also wished to meet him. The Welsh barrister wanted to hear at first hand the astonishing allegations which had been made against his party's leader the day before. Meeting Scott would also give him the chance to cross-examine the man. After all, he was a practising courtroom lawyer, capable of tearing Scott's story to shreds if, as he suspected, he was telling malicious and unsavoury lies.

For the second time in twenty-four hours Norman Scott found himself being challenged about his relationship with Jeremy Thorpe. David Steel and Helen Roberts were there again but had been joined this time by Emlyn Hooson. In a tense meeting which stretched through the afternoon the two MPs fired question after question at Scott.

"I formed the strong impression," Hooson told Penrose and Courtior later, "that Norman Scott had a definite fixation about Jeremy Thorpe, somewhat in the manner of a jilted girl. I remember saying to Scott: 'Supposing Thorpe did treat you badly: what right have you to be maintained by him?'"

Hooson said that both he and David Steel had pressed Scott for

further evidence of what he was saying. The model had mentioned affectionate letters which he claimed Jeremy Thorpe had written to him in the early 1960s. But he had not produced any of them. Scott had told an odd story about how Scotland Yard were holding letters and would not return them to him. Other letters, he said were being kept by a couple he had once known in Tewkesbury: the husband's name was Major Shute.

"In 1971 I suggested Scott should get hold of those letters if they existed," said Hooson. "But he produced nothing for us to see." Courtiour found this remark slightly puzzling because he himself found it easy enough to locate Major Shute. He wondered why the barrister had not employed someone to contact the Major when Scott did not do so himself.

Scott did, however, have quite a number of documents with him that afternoon and Hooson asked if he might photocopy some of them. The model readily agreed and handed over his file of letters and papers.

Although sceptical, shortly afterwards Hooson told Steel privately that they ought to investigate the matter fully as it could have serious repercussions for the whole Party as well as for Jeremy Thorpe. Steel immediately agreed that there should be a proper internal enquiry to establish if any of the allegations against their leader could be substantiated.

Some of the questions which Hooson and Steel directed at Scott also needed to be put to the Liberal leader himself. But at the end of May 1971 Jeremy Thorpe was visiting Africa: a continent which not only fascinated him politically, but where he had growing business interests. He was a personal friend of President Kaunda of Zambia and he had become a director of a company called Indeco, a mining concern part-owned by the Zambian Government.

With Jeremy Thorpe abroad, Hooson and Steel were trying to cope with an extraordinary and unprecedented situation. They were both well aware that the matter must be handled with the greatest delicacy and secrecy. A leak to the Press could cause the Party untold damage. But Scott's allegations were also serious because they struck at the very roots of the Party's liberal humanitarian philosophy "... if they were true, of course", as David Steel reminded the reporters when they visited him at Westminster.

Emlyn Hooson had looked carefully through Scott's file of

papers and had been puzzled by the "retainer" letters which Bessell had sent to the model years before.

In the first week of June, Emlyn Hooson telephoned Bessell.

"Have you been making payments to a man called Norman Scott?" he asked the former MP sharply. Bessell said he certainly had. He had sent Scott small sums of money in the past.

Bessell's recollection of the call tallied almost exactly with the account Hooson gave to the two reporters. Some sentences were practically identical, word for word, although the intention of the two men at the time had been entirely different.

According to Bessell's account: "Hooson said: 'This man Scott makes allegations against Jeremy' and for the first three or four minutes I assumed that what Emlyn was saying was: 'This is an awful mess, what can we do to protect Jeremy?' And then the conversation swung and Emlyn took the wind completely out of my sails by saying: 'Jeremy will have to go, he will have to resign as leader of the Liberal Party and he will also have to resign his seat in Parliament.'"

Hooson's recollection of the same moment was: "Bessell suddenly told me: 'It's bound to come out sometime.' He rather took the wind out of my sails at the time."

Bessell was dumbfounded by the sudden chill which had entered the conversation. When Hooson reacted by exclaiming that Jeremy would have to resign he realised he had misjudged the Welsh MP completely.

"I said simply 'Good Lord'," recalled Bessell. "I told Emlyn I understood his concern. You see I imagined he had shown sympathy for Jeremy's predicament and was really offering to help in a cover-up: hence his phrase: 'This is an awful mess, what can we do to protect Jeremy?' When he changed tack I just wanted to slam the receiver down as quickly as possible."

Bessell realised at once that he had made a thoughtless admission which immediately placed the Liberal leader in grave danger. But within minutes he had set about retrieving the situation. "I called Jeremy at his home in Oxted and his mother said he was in Africa," explained Bessell. "She said that he was expected back the following day. So I took the overnight sleeper to London."

In the meantime Emlyn Hooson had also been busy, fired by the knowledge of the conversation he had just had. Hooson was deeply shocked and anxious to tell David Steel the news he had only just heard.

Hooson and Steel immediately agreed that in the light of what Bessell had said Jeremy Thorpe would have to resign.

But David Steel was disturbed by the new twist in the private enquiry which he and his colleague had started. He decided that first he too must hear the new corroborative evidence from the former Member of Parliament for Bodmin.

For the time being, however, no one else could talk to Bessell: he was already aboard the night train to Paddington. He was only too aware of the potential consequences of what he had done. Jeremy Thorpe had now been placed in a very vulnerable position, the more so because the man to whom he had made his admission was the Liberal leader's political rival.

"I saw Jeremy the moment he flew back into London," he told Penrose. "I explained what had happened and he told me: 'Don't worry, pretend the conversation never took place.' Which is exactly what I did when David Steel called me and asked me about the conversation I had had with Hooson. I denied I had confirmed Scott's story: that is how we staved off disaster."

It was, in its way, a shrewd and effective ploy, whichever of the two men actually thought of it. There was no secret about the fact that Emlyn Hooson would clearly have loved to become the leader of the Liberal Party in place of Jeremy Thorpe. Any unsubstantiated claims that Hooson made against Thorpe, therefore, were liable to be seen by those who thought in terms of political in-fighting as a rather biased move to oust the established leader.

Hooson's position had been considerably weakened by Bessell's denial of the telephone conversation. And when Thorpe was tackled about the allegations themselves he denied altogether that there had been a homosexual relationship with Scott.

Thorpe did not for a moment deny that he had known Norman Scott back in the early 1960s. But he had only befriended Scott and then the wretch had turned on him.

Thorpe and Hooson had a blazing row behind closed doors which Hooson described to Penrose and Courtiour:

"Thorpe blew up completely," he confided. "He told me he would see to it that my legal career was ruined. Our scene was very unpleasant. I told him he was either innocent or a mixture of Oscar Wilde and Horatio Bottomley."

In spite of their turbulent exchanges, it was agreed that the Party would hold an official, though secret, enquiry. But Thorpe wanted Lord Byers, the Liberal leader in the House of Lords,

to be brought into the picture. Byers could approach Reginald Maudling, the Home Secretary in Edward Heath's Government, if he thought it necessary.

While all this was being arranged, Norman Scott waited nervously, wondering what the outcome of his visits to the House of Commons would be. Helen Roberts and Emlyn Hooson telephoned regularly to ask if he was all right and remind him to obtain the other letters of which he had spoken. He told them he was fine in the circumstances and being well looked after by his friends Jack and Stella Levy.

Hooson told Courtiour and Penrose that he had also spoken with Scott's mother. On the telephone Mrs Josiffe had confirmed that her son had had a close friendship with Jeremy Thorpe.

Mrs Josiffe told Penrose that she remembered the Welsh MP's call to her. "Yes, Hooson rang me in 1971," she confirmed. "And so did David Steel. They asked me: was it true that my son had had an affectionate relationship with Mr Thorpe. I said that I thought that every word my son had told them was true."

In fact, Emlyn Hooson did appear to be attempting to establish the truth or falsehood of Scott's claims, despite the potentially inhibiting effect of his exchanges with Jeremy Thorpe.

Scott had already mentioned that in 1962 he had been questioned by Scotland Yard officers, so Hooson got in contact with Scotland Yard and was eventually put in touch with the police station to which Detective-Sergeant, later Inspector, Edward Smith was now attached.

When Courtiour spoke to ex-Chief Superintendent John Perkins the policeman confirmed that he had decided that it would be advisable for him to accompany Detective-Inspector Smith when he attended the Liberal Party enquiry. As Smith's superior officer he felt obliged to protect Scotland Yard's interests in what was clearly a delicate situation. The two police officers would be present throughout the proceedings and Perkins would be the one to answer questions, but only if specifically called upon to do so.

The Liberal Party enquiry into Norman Scott's allegations opened in the early afternoon of Wednesday 9 June 1971. Frank Byers, leader of the Liberal peers in the House of Lords since 1967, was the Party's respected "elder statesman". David Steel and Emlyn Hooson had brought him up to date with the results of their own discreet enquiries and now it was for Lord Byers to decide what he thought of Scott's allegations against their Party

leader. To that end, he intended cross-examining Norman Scott himself.

The three politicians formed an extraordinary triumvirate which had no power in law, of course, but every power to end Jeremy Thorpe's brilliant career if it were to find against him. Its very existence was a closely guarded secret in Party circles. A select few had heard rumours of the investigation – Richard Wainwright, the Party's Chairman, had at one stage been invited to attend – but the opinion seemed to be that Byers, Steel and Hooson would get to the truth of the case.

"I had every confidence in them," said Wainwright, when he talked to Courtiour on the telephone. "After all, two of them were lawyers, the other a gifted politician. There seemed no reason for me to join them that day."

Norman Scott arrived for the enquiry feeling frightened and threatened, as he told Penrose years afterwards:

"I felt very nervous about what I was walking into. One felt these men were incredibly powerful."

Scott, like many Englishmen, also felt an innate respect and affection for Parliament and a pride in its institutions, powers and traditions. As a young man he had witnessed its pomp and ceremony at first hand for several years.

"Lord Byers looked at me as if I was absolutely loathsome," Scott claimed. "He was not at all affable and he didn't offer me a chair. I felt like a boy at school being up before the headmaster."

The meeting began with Lord Byers asking Scott how he had first met Jeremy Thorpe. Scott went through his story once more, a story that David Steel and Emlyn Hooson had by now heard several times.

"Frank Byers said he had read the documents I had brought with me," said Scott. "But he added that there was nothing to prove there had ever been a homosexual relationship with Mr Thorpe."

Lord Byers then asked if Scott had any of the "love letters" he claimed had been sent to him in the past.

"I said I no longer had the letters," Scott admitted. "Then Lord Byers told me: 'I put it to you that you are lying?' I told him very clearly that I did not tell lies."

When Scott began asking the whereabouts of his Insurance cards and repeating his claim that Mr Thorpe had once held and stamped them, Lord Byers became incensed at such a suggestion. He said

he believed Scott was very sick and should consider entering hospital. Somebody from the Liberal Party could perhaps arrange for him to get treatment in a proper clinic.

By merely mentioning medical care the peer had struck at one of Scott's worst fears. The memory of his experience in Ireland, when he had been hauled off to a mental hospital by the Dublin police, flashed through his mind. The mood in the room was changing from compassionate understanding of the model's problems to a witch-hunting indignation at what Lord Byers believed were his fanciful and mischievous lies.

Scott said he snapped back at the peer: "I'm not impressed by the fact that you've got a title. I remember you as plain Frank Byers. I remember seeing you several times at the Reform Club with Jeremy!"

Hooson told the reporters that Lord Byers did seem to lose his patience and his temper at this point.

"Byers then said: 'Mr Scott, I put it to you that you are a common blackmailer.'"

Before leaving the room in a fury, Scott replied that in his opinion it was he who had been the victim, not Thorpe.

"I have been morally blackmailed," said Scott. "That's what I told Byers. 'I have been morally blackmailed by your party. Through my loyalty to Jeremy I kept quiet. I did nothing. I have no Insurance cards. And I have lost everything.'"

Curiously, Scott had not noticed that there were two other men in the room apart from Lord Byers, David Steel and Emlyn Hooson. Years later he could still only remember one man; a man who did not speak. While Scott and Lord Byers argued, the two policemen had made sure they took no part in the proceedings. Chief Superintendent Perkins did however make clear to the enquiry later that afternoon that as far as Scotland Yard was concerned the Liberal leader had no case to answer. There were no plans for a prosecution or indeed any further enquiries into the affair.

"As far as we're concerned, Norman Scott is a bit of a nutter," the Chief Superintendent told the three politicians. The remark apparently reassured Lord Byers, reinforcing the words with which he had already frightened Scott earlier.

Penrose asked Hooson, when they met him at the Commons in June 1976, if the police had shown them the lengthy statement which Scott had made to the Chelsea police in 1962. The MP

shook his head. He had located the police officer who had taken down the statement, but Scotland Yard had not produced any documents for the Liberal Party enquiry.

Courtiour handed Hooson a copy of Scott's statement. Although it still represented only an unproven allegation, he had also passed some private correspondence to the police at exactly the same time.

Hooson carefully read through the six pages that Scott had dictated to Edward Smith fourteen years before. He said he was flabbergasted, not simply because of the explicit detail the statement contained, but that it had never been mentioned by Scotland Yard at the enquiry. The barrister, who was no stranger to reading police statements and assessing their value in court, said that if he and his colleagues had been shown a copy of this one in 1971, along with the letters, the outcome of the Party enquiry would, in his opinion, have been very different.

"Clearly we were being misled by the police," said Hooson in an exasperated tone. "But I fail to understand why." He continued shaking his head in apparent disbelief at what had occurred five years earlier.

On 23 February 1977 Courtiour spoke to ex-Chief Superintendent John Perkins who had retired by that time to a village near the market town of Bury St Edmunds. When they chatted, the reporter had no idea that it would be the last chance anyone would have to check the events with him. Within a matter of days he was to suffer a heart attack and die.

He was a big, avuncular man with a kindly manner and an air of taciturn dignity that concealed his high-ranking authority.

Courtiour asked him about Scott's 1962 statement and he confirmed that he knew about that. He did not know for certain, however, whether the statement had been referred to the Home Office or to the Director of Public Prosecutions back in 1962, but he felt personally that it was bound to have gone to the DPP. In answer to Courtiour's innocent question as to whether the police had come under pressure at all in the matter of the Scott affair, the ex-policeman simply grinned and said no, not that he knew of.

On the subject of the two policemen's role at the 1971 enquiry he said: "I went along to make sure that Detective-Inspector Smith did not get himself into any trouble." And his explanation for not having provided the enquiry with any evidence was breathtakingly simple: "We were not asked," he told Courtiour.

So, although Norman Scott had been unable to produce any documents the police obviously could have done so. They could have opened their file on the case, which for the three Liberal politicians would have been a virtual Pandora's box. If Scotland Yard had agreed that their officers could attend the Liberal enquiry, why had they not cooperated fully? Why had they held back vital evidence which might have settled the matter once and for all? If the police wanted to keep out of potentially troublesome political waters why had they not steered clear of the enquiry altogether instead of appearing to lend their authority to the proceedings?

For the moment the reporters had no real answers to these questions.

## Chapter 16

After the enquiry Norman Scott was clearly in a tree-kicking mood again and being less than fair. His own behaviour in face of Lord Byers's provocation had contributed a good deal to the outcome of the enquiry, and he was unaware of just how little the police had said about his rather garbled story.

Emlyn Hooson for his part continued to be unconvinced that the enquiry had settled anything, and he wrote his own carefully worded letter to Mrs Parry-Jones, in which he explained that:

Obviously, my concern, and that of Mr Steel, is of the very serious allegations made against one of our colleagues in an eminent position which are strenuously denied by that person. On the other hand, the young man tells a very convincing story and is obviously in a very distressed state, so that the question of corroboration is very important.

With regard to the welfare of the young man you will appreciate that, even if his story is correct and is provable, then he does not appear to have a legal claim of any kind against Mr T. That there would be a moral obligation if the story is correct is undoubted. However, it is vitally important for me and my colleagues to clear away any suspicion of blackmail and this we are proceeding to do.

David Steel and Lord Byers, however, appeared less anxious to pursue the matter. Lord Byers still seemed to want to think only in the terms in which he had addressed Scott at the enquiry. Five years later, on 1 February 1976, the *Observer* quoted him as still saying: "The more we listened to him, the more we felt sorry for him." David Steel, when Penrose and Courtiour spoke to him in his room at the House of Commons on 9 July 1977, summed up his own attitude with the words: "I am not interested, frankly, in finding out more about this whole sorry affair."

In fact, it was David Steel who had informed the Liberal leader that the enquiry had taken place and that he had been cleared of

the charges laid against him by Scott. If his colleagues were less inclined to see the outcome as quite so clear-cut, Thorpe did not hesitate to use this as an opportunity to try and slam the file shut once and for all. He promptly sent a handwritten letter to Lord Byers asking that the matter be officially closed now as far as the party was concerned. He also wrote to the Conservative Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, asking for confirmation from the Home Office that they had no further interest in the case. After all, there had been two police officers at the enquiry and they were ultimately responsible to the Home Secretary. Mr Maudling sent back a very brief letter to Mr Thorpe agreeing that the Home Office had no further interest.

But if the Liberal Party and the Home Office were prepared to sweep certain things under the carpet, they had not exactly left Norman Scott in a frame of mind to let the dust settle. Unknown to them, as he thrashed about in frustration, he was on the point of raising a sandstorm which could easily embarrass the establishment if it happened to be caught by winds from south of the Sahara.

When Scott left his inquisitors on that Wednesday afternoon, no longer able to face what Emlyn Hooson had described as Lord Byers's "loud voice and irascibility", he went to telephone his mother from a public kiosk. He complained bitterly that the Liberals would not believe his story. Mrs Josiffe tried valiantly to calm him down and prevent him from harming himself. She asked her son if anybody else would help.

"Scotland Yard was one possibility," Scott remembered, "because of the letters I had given them in 1962, and the statement I had made at the same time." So, like Emlyn Hooson, he obtained from Scotland Yard the phone number for Sergeant Smith, now Inspector Smith, who had taken down the statement. Smith was then stationed at Southwark, a short distance away on the other side of the Thames, and asked Scott to come and see him the following afternoon, 10 June.

When Scott arrived at Southwark Police Station he explained the position. Would it be possible to have the letters which he had passed over in 1962 so that he could prove his story to the Liberals? The police were kindly but firm; avoiding the point that Scott had a right to these documents, they said it would not be possible to get them. But they suggested it would help him if he sat down and made another statement. Scott agreed and virtually poured out his life story. The completed document covered



thirty-three pages, each signed by E. A. Smith and witnessed by his superior officer, Chief Superintendent John Perkins. During all this process Scott was unconscious of the irony that both policemen had been present at the Liberal Party enquiry.

Later, Penrose and Courtiour obtained the full text of this second police statement, and again it was so detailed that they could scarcely believe that no action should have been taken as a result of it.

Norman Scott said he remembered how that long day ended on his way back to the Levys' flat. "I was in a car with Mr Perkins," he said. "I was sitting in the back. He explained that the reason the police wanted a statement was because the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Norman Skelhorn, had a dossier on twelve or fourteen MPs. I remember he said that all of them were security risks."

According to Scott, he repeated to Perkins that he only wanted his file of 1962 letters back, and Perkins had replied: "I don't think you'll ever see them again." But the next day the police allowed Scott to collect from Scotland Yard the file he had given to Perkins. This at least left him his original correspondence with Peter Bessell and one or two other items, although he had not succeeded in getting a copy of his 1962 statement or his 1971 statement, or indeed the original letters, which he had handed to the police years before. If the police felt at that stage that the "retainer" letters from Peter Bessell might be evidence of blackmail on Scott's part, they had now actually had an opportunity to examine the originals at leisure and apparently returned them as innocuous.

For Scott who had pinned his hopes on getting satisfaction from the Liberal Party enquiry, the next few days were still a bitter time. Surely his friends Jack and Stella Levy believed what he was saying? Jack Levy, an advertising designer, told Penrose later: "We had known Norman for several years and we liked him as a person . . . he would dramatise events in his life and told fantastically involved stories which, frankly, we took with a pinch of salt. We tended not to believe him, although events have proved us largely wrong."

Lesley Ebbetts was a friend of the Levys and called in one evening at their flat for a drink. When Jack introduced Leslie he mentioned that she was a freelance journalist who wrote for the *Daily Mirror*.

"Norman asked me if anyone might be interested in his story," she told Courtiour. "He told me his allegations about Thorpe and showed me letters from Peter Bessell: I was rather staggered."

Lesley Ebbetts wrote about fashion and she promised she would introduce him to a colleague called Jill Evans who was on the *Daily Mirror* staff. Jill would know better how to handle the story.

"Naturally I was sceptical about Scott's claims," she explained. "But one evening I remember being with Jack and Stella and the phone rang. Norman didn't want to take the call at first. When he did he waved at us to listen in on the extension."

"That call was strange," she said. "It was someone warning him off in no uncertain way. It was not just a frightener, but somebody saying 'We've had enough, we don't want any more. Worrying your friends isn't going to help.'"

Shortly afterwards Lesley Ebbetts introduced Norman Scott to Jill Evans and they went over the story in detail.

The two women journalists had agreed that Scott needed a tough investigative reporter to handle this story. There would certainly be libel problems and possibly political pressures. Jill Evans suggested that Gordon Winter was the man for the job and they had agreed to put Scott in touch with him. Thus, by remarkable coincidence, he made contact with a journalist with known South African contacts.

This decision was to lead to some embarrassing publicity for Winter in due course. On 31 January 1976, the *Daily Mirror* carried a story under the heading "Thorpe Hunter" which hinted broadly that Winter might be a South African "spy" and claimed that the British-born reporter had campaigned to smear Thorpe.

At that time in 1971 Winter lived in Pont Street, in the expensive London district of Chelsea. He specialised in stories of a political nature, and particularly ones with a South African interest. He seemed to make a good living from journalism, and his library of tape recordings, documents and photographs became legendary in the circles in which he moved. He had worked for two black papers in South Africa called *Drum* and *Post*, until his stay in South Africa had come to an abrupt halt in the mid-1960s when a gun he had loaned to a friend was used to commit a murder.

After the murder trial in 1966, Winter had been deported from South Africa, and his return there in 1974 was taken by some people as clear proof that he had strong links with the South African Security Services.

During his period in England Winter stayed in journalism and became Membership Secretary of the London Freelance Branch of the National Union of Journalists. Lionel Morrison, the Treasurer of the Freelance Branch, recalled that there had been criticism of Winter: it was felt that he had used his position to discriminate against left-wing and radical journalists.

Despite Winter's spirited denials that he had links with South Africa's Security Services he was certainly connected with one intelligence agency, even if he was not strictly aware of the fact at the time.

When he was with *Drum* and *Post* in South Africa, Winter had worked under Cecil Eprile, who later became managing director of a London news agency called Forum World Features.

Winter too worked for Forum for seven years while he was in London. But Forum World Features was no ordinary news agency. When it was established, alongside its sister agencies Preuves Informations (in French from Paris) and El Mundo en Espanol (in Spanish from Paris), it came to serve 250 papers in 53 countries. Freelance journalists were paid a higher rate than most news agencies paid at the time. This was perhaps explained by the fact that Forum had a secret subsidy.

In 1975 an American Senate sub-committee hearing in Washington on intelligence services was told that Forum World Features was founded by the CIA. It had been established to place right-wing articles in newspapers around the world and to "launder" money paid to journalists working for the CIA.

Forum was headed from 1965 until 1975 by an English writer and journalist called Brian Crozier. When the news agency closed down suddenly in 1975 Crozier moved its extensive library to a registered charity he had set up five years before, the Institute for the Study of Conflict.

According to the Institute's own prospectus, "the driving motivation behind ISC is the defence of free industrial societies against totalitarian encroachments". The fields covered by the Institute include "subversion, attempts to undermine society, in the universities, Parliament, government, and other fields".

Winter continued to be an occasional visitor at the Institute's offices in Northumberland Avenue, near South Africa House. (The Institute is still dedicated to countering subversion and has an excellent network of contacts in Whitehall, the police forces, intelligence services, and the armed forces.)

When it was revealed that Forum was a CIA-funded news agency Winter said he was not surprised in the least.

"I was not suspicious," he told Penrose "because I'd already been told by well-known left-wing activists at high levels in Britain that Forum was a CIA front. They existed to gather information on all levels of British society and also on African affairs. Quite frankly, I will be honest with you, although I was told it on good authority I did not believe it."

Some radicals were disturbed by the ease and speed with which Winter heard in detail about confidential meetings and surprise demonstrations, particularly around the Anti-Apartheid Movement in London. False leads were planted to uncover if the people involved were being bugged or if they had a spy in their midst.

Winter himself shrugged off these political imputations. He enjoyed his parallel reputation as a tough investigative reporter and at his first meeting with Norman Scott he played this role to the hilt – with nearly disastrous consequences, as he later told Penrose:

"I was in like a rattlesnake," said Winter. "Norman was physically jolted by my questions, his face was nerve-racked. I thought, 'I have got a nut case here.'"

Winter recalled that he had noticed that whenever Norman winced, so did the whippet which he had brought with him to the interview.

"My breakthrough came when I made Scott a pot of tea. I served him the tea and poured milk into a saucer for his whippet. He suddenly saw that this 'bastard' was not a bastard 'because he feeds my dog Emma'."

Gradually the tension between the two men eased and over the next fortnight Winter tape-recorded the whole of Scott's story, from the moment the model had met Thorpe to the enquiry at the House of Commons only a few days before.

Scott cooperated happily, relieved to find someone who believed him at last and took him seriously. He spoke obsessively about his missing Insurance cards, but Winter was shrewd enough to see that other issues were involved. As Scott's confidence increased, he allowed Winter to copy all the material in his file.

To Scott, the file was still a precious thread of evidence linking him with the Liberal Party leader. But to an outsider the evidence was open to interpretation, and this was a point that Winter put to Scott:

"This all smacks of blackmail," he told him. "Either you have been blackmailing Peter Bessell or you have been blackmailing Jeremy Thorpe."

"Scott's response was devastatingly frank."

"You may call it blackmail if you wish," he replied, "but it is what I feel I am entitled to following the promises made to me."

However obsessive Scott's behaviour had become, it was clear to Winter that in the legal sense he was not a blackmailer: "Norman felt that he had been jilted. He had been disorientated by his close friendship with Thorpe and he also claimed that this had helped destroy his marriage to Sue Myers."

With everything on tape, Winter then took Scott's story to a popular Sunday newspaper, the *People*. Each Sunday this paper was delivered to four million homes in the UK where readers enjoyed its mixture of "sexposé" and serious investigation. The Editor, Robert Edwards, may or may not have been surprised when, after checking Winter's material, executives at the *People* decided not to follow the matter up. Far from using it as a basis for a series of articles in the newspaper's accustomed style, they consigned the material to a safe at the newspaper's offices for the next three years.

Winter, curiously for a freelance whose income depended on selling his stories, made no attempt to recover the material from the *People*, nor did he try to sell the story elsewhere in Fleet Street, or abroad. When Penrose questioned him on whether this meant he had passed on the Scott story to the Bureau for State Security in South Africa, the journalist vehemently denied the allegation; "I am not a spy working for BOSS," he said, "the suggestion is laughable. In fact," he went on, "I passed the information to British Intelligence!"

This confident assertion startled Penrose.

Winter certainly seemed to have unusual contacts for a journalist. But Winter insisted that he had kept a copy of the report that he had sent to the *People* and passed it to a contact in "DI5".

"Everybody knows," he continued, "that British Intelligence, the CIA and the Bureau swap information. I did not need to hand it to the South Africans."

If Gordon Winter's claim was to be believed, then he had singlehandedly destroyed any chance that the Scott affair could remain a domestic secret. His report, carefully compiled over a whole fortnight with Norman Scott, had by the summer of 1971

reached not only Fleet Street but also the Intelligence Services of at least three nations.

For anybody who one day might wish to use the swelling file for political ends, the question now became which would be more useful: to publish now, or to help it remain unpublished so that its cancerous effects could spread in secret?

Penrose and Courtiour assumed for the moment that Gordon Winter had been realistic enough to see that Norman Scott's account was likely to be regarded as fanciful by the editor of any newspaper. They themselves were still working flat out investigating every aspect of the story. They flattered themselves that Winter could never have got very far in a fortnight. In a sense, therefore, it was possible that when Winter approached the *People* some might say he was only half-heartedly going through the motions of trying to get the material published. The real decision about future publication – or indeed the ability to threaten publication – was placed in the hands of the Intelligence Services: which included, according to Gordon Winter, the South African Bureau for State Security.

If Gordon Winter had succeeded in publishing Scott's material back in 1971, as far as he knew – and he had scarcely had time even to guess at all the other political implications that Penrose and Courtiour had discovered – it would probably not have led to much more than a setback, certainly, for the British Liberal Party, but hardly a crucial influence on world events or even a calamity for British politics as a whole. There would, of course, still be the potential embarrassment to the Labour Government of the mid-1960s, but there was no certainty that Winter and others knew much about it in 1971.

From a Machiavellian point of view it seemed clear that the knowledge gained by Winter and passed on to others could, if it were stored away quietly and added to, become the nucleus of a much bigger bombshell – either to be used as a tactical deterrent or exploded as the occasion demanded.

In the cynical world of intelligence agencies, where the foibles of men can be exploited at times as a covert instrument of national and international politics, such excruciating conflicts between the individual's conscience and the laws of society are the spawning grounds of treachery. Jeremy Thorpe might well be viewed by BOSS, the CIA – or for that matter the KGB – not as a promising career politician serving his country, but as just another potential

victim who could possibly be used one day to weaken his country's government.

Jeremy Thorpe in 1971 was certainly an interesting subject for any intelligence agency to place under observation. For purposes of de-stabilisation the Liberal leader need only be given the occasional shock to make him rush around and contaminate the important people with whom he came into contact. Every time Norman Scott threatened to open his mouth, or when an election was coming up which made the politicians nervous about disclosures, some new figure seemed to be drawn into the secret.

The case history of Jeremy Thorpe would perhaps be banked in a computer at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia; with BOSS in Pretoria, and in other intelligence organisations elsewhere. Stored and coded alongside the personal, and probably compromising, records of other prominent figures around the world, it would remain available for instant access, one day to be electronically extracted for possible use in a covert operation.

One problem facing British Intelligence was that the Russians too might take an interest in the matter, just as they had in the Profumo-Keeler scandal of 1963. The Czech Secret Service in London were also not shy about exploiting the private passions of foreign politicians if they fell into their clutches.

As Penrose and Courtiour had discovered, by this juncture in 1971 several leading politicians, policemen, journalists and now Intelligence men, had come to learn privately about the embarrassing tale of the British Liberal leader and the male model. But in the best British traditions the affair had been kept closely under wraps and its hidden dangers treated as if they all believed that the affair could be kept under control.

But were they right to be so confident?

## Chapter 17

On 25 March 1972, Gwen Parry-Jones was found dead at her home in Tal-y-Bont. The post mortem on her body showed that she had been dead for about a fortnight when she was discovered.

"A very high level of alcohol – 412 milligrams – was present in the body," the pathologist concluded. She had also taken aspirin, Mogadon and Librium in small amounts, but death, in his opinion, had been caused by alcoholic poisoning.

When the inquest opened at Bangor on 4 May, Norman Scott was one of the witnesses.

When Norman Scott took his place on the stand, he told the Coroner that Gwen used to take sleeping pills every night and would, as a rule, have one glass of whisky as a nightcap.

But he added that Gwen had frequently told him that she did not feel able to go on.

The young man was beginning to show signs of emotion. It was often like this at inquests: by this time the Coroner had stopped making notes of what the witness was saying.

Then unexpectedly, quite out of the blue, Scott said something that brought everyone in the courtroom to life. He suddenly blurted out that Gwen Parry-Jones had become sad and depressed because of a visit she had made with him to the House of Commons a few months previously. She had been unable to get over something that happened there.

A local freelance journalist, Derek Bellis, told Courtiour that he remembered the moment exactly. Checking back over his notes, he described the scene to the reporter over the phone: "Scott said Mrs Parry-Jones had gone with him to London to see Emlyn Hooson, MP. 'She was a very good person and couldn't believe that corruption of politics could be such,' he added. According to Scott, he was asked by a solicitor representing the dead woman's family whether he had been Mr Thorpe's agent and replied, 'No, I had a close friendship with him for six years.' Asked on what basis, Scott alleged a homosexual relationship. Scott said he thought the

whole situation regarding the documents would be sorted out by Emlyn Hooson and Mr David Steel."

At this, the Coroner interrupted and wanted to know where all these questions were leading. Being upset at losing a companion was one thing, but this really seemed to be going a bit too far. When Penrose and Courtiour visited him at his offices he was candid about his reaction to Scott's outburst:

"When Scott made these strange allegations against Jeremy Thorpe I thought: I don't want to know anything about it, just push off. This fellow, he's a bit looney."

The Coroner told the now buzzing court that the case presented him with some major difficulties in arriving at a verdict. The pathologist had said the cause of death was alcoholic poisoning. And the amount of drugs taken was remarkably low.

"She did have her mental troubles and there must have been some stresses of varying severity on her mind," he went on. "I am not satisfied, however, that there is clear evidence of self-destruction and the safest course is to record an open verdict."

Derek Bellis recalled the excitement around the court when reporters compared their notes on what Norman Scott had alleged about Jeremy Thorpe.

"I know," he said, "the reporters immediately got in touch with leading figures in the Liberal Party that night. But nobody could stand up what Scott had alleged and their papers just could not use the story."

But whatever their reasons for not going ahead, in the light of what they had discovered Penrose and Courtiour felt that the newspapers had missed out on a major story. It was even a little strange that they had all unanimously decided to take it no further.

## Chapter 18

By the beginning of July 1976, Courtiour and Penrose had already spent six gruelling but absorbing weeks working for the Special Unit which had been established at the BBC's Lime Grove studios. The Red File notes covering each day-to-day step of their investigations were now so thick that they had begun to fill a second folder, and were still being passed regularly to the Director-General according to their secret arrangement. But at this stage the file was not a coherent account: there were enormous gaps and question marks in the material and it was mainly the reporters' own instincts that made them so certain of the story's ultimate importance. Although they had grown quite used to chatting with Sir Harold Wilson, they were still hypnotised by the privilege of having him as their high-ranking source, and they had not yet come round to acknowledging that while the ex-Prime Minister spoke about a "threat to democracy" it was quite a different and more sophisticated threat to democracy that they were actually discovering.

If the Special Unit had been a newspaper rather than a broadcasting corporation, they would already have accumulated enough stories to fill several front pages. But during the summer Parliamentary recess, when some of the regular political programmes were off the air, there was no real pressure on the two reporters to rush into publication even with further topical items like the Cheeseman interview. Sir Charles and Sir Harold had agreed at Lord North Street that their joint enquiry would be a "slow burner", so they could look forward to having much more time for detailed research and filming. Bookshelves at their homes began to fill with an extensive library of notes, confidential documents, tapes and transcripts, and with Sir Harold as a primary source of information they could be reasonably confident that they would remain ahead of any other journalists working in the same area.

But there was an altogether different consideration which they tended unwisely to ignore. The BBC was an instinctively cautious

organisation. And in their view it was increasingly conservative where matters of British party politics were concerned.

By Royal Charter the BBC had been given freedom and political independence from any government of the day which might wish to influence its policies or its programmes. And it had rightly established throughout the world an outstanding record for the highest broadcasting standards.

Courtiour and Penrose both believed strongly that they would be able to get the results of their investigation transmitted, just as they had other stories in the past. Sir Harold had already suggested that back-bench MPs might help by raising questions in Parliament and these could serve as pegs for filmed reports on the same subjects.

Gordon Carr, however, introduced a cautionary note into the reporters' regular discussions at Lime Grove: a reservation that grew stronger as he heard the rumblings of disquiet from some quarters of Broadcasting House.

Penrose and Courtiour tried hard to dismiss such pessimistic arguments from his mind and their own. They were confident that with the personal backing of the former Premier and the Director-General, they would get their stories on the air. But this ebbed slightly when they began to hear nervous questions direct from the top. From time to time they would meet the Director-General's Chief Assistant, Peter Hardiman Scott, at Broadcasting House and hand him their latest Red File notes. He would later brief the Director-General and other executives.

Hardiman Scott had repeatedly asked the reporters if they knew why Sir Harold was helping them? What were his real motives? They still genuinely did not know the answer.

On Friday 2 July 1976, all three men from the Special Unit were asked to be at Broadcasting House for a meeting, with Desmond Taylor, the overall Head of the Corporation's News and Current Affairs departments. He was carrying a copy of their Red File.

"I've read the notes up to date," he said. "We'll talk about it at the meeting. There are important matters to sort out."

Taylor had been away when the Special Unit had first been set up, and he did not approve in general of ordinary reporters working directly to the Director-General. The BBC's organisation was a structured hierarchy and he was also disturbed by the implications of the Liberal Party material. "Do men really behave like this?" he asked Peter Hardiman Scott. Perhaps he was

thinking of a suggestion by Peter Bessell in the Red File notes of 22 June that men had attempted to murder Scott.

"I'm afraid they do, Desmond, I'm afraid they do," replied the D-G's Chief Assistant.

When the meeting itself began, Hardiman Scott expressed the concern at once: "We seem to have concentrated a great deal on the Thorpe story," he said.

Courtiour felt faintly annoyed. He had recently completed a fifteen-page report on their South African findings to date and by no means all of the Red File centred on Thorpe and the Liberal Party. But the Director-General's Chief Assistant pressed the point further. Did they believe that the new information they were obtaining might bring down the Liberal Party?

The question was an inevitable one, particularly from the BBC's former Political Correspondent at Westminster. If the Liberals were harmed, millions of votes could well swing to the right to ensure a Conservative victory at the next General Election. It might then be argued that the BBC had interfered politically and influenced the choice of the next government.

But it seemed strange, even in the light of the BBC's disappointing record in recent investigative journalism, that these particular executives who were journalists first and foremost, should be expressing such premature fears.

For the moment, however, the exchange stayed on the level of inter-party rivalries and prejudices.

When Penrose explained that they were simply following the original leads suggested by the former Prime Minister, Taylor quickly interrupted.

"I'll tell you what we can do with Harold Wilson," he said impatiently. "We can drop him just like that. Whenever we want." He snapped his fingers angrily.

Then Taylor changed his attack. "Talking of Wilson, I want Gordon Carr to join you at your meetings with him at Lord North Street. Understand?"

Both reporters disagreed with the idea and said so. Harold Wilson had entered into an agreement with the Director-General: they were part of it and would not break it. Why risk upsetting the man?

"I'll tell you why," said Taylor, brusquely. "Because I'm telling you to."

Hardiman Scott then asked Penrose and Courtiour if they knew

how to get in direct touch with Sir Harold. They were startled by the question. Then he explained that he had had no luck in trying to see Sir Harold through his political office. They were puzzled: only they had been authorised to contact the former Prime Minister.

At this stage perhaps the executives saw the concern on the reporters' faces because Desmond Taylor suddenly closed the meeting. The Unit could continue, at least for the time being.

"It really would be better if you could concentrate far less on the Jeremy Thorpe area of the story," Hardiman Scott added.

The two reporters still felt resentful. Somehow they were being headed off from what appeared to be a strong story of political intrigue.

After the meeting Courtiour and Penrose explained to Carr why it would not be a good idea for him to join their meetings with Harold Wilson. Journalists instinctively guarded their sources: surely he knew that? Carr reluctantly agreed.

Others in the BBC hierarchy were equally sceptical about the way the enquiry was developing. The reporters had also briefed Brian Wenham, the head of Current Affairs, that summer about the latest developments. It had been Wenham's decision, backed by his deputy John Tisdall, not to transmit a long controversial interview with Peter Bessell. The same decision was taken about the interview recorded with Norman Scott in May that year. The editors of the *Tonight* programme and *Panorama* also decided to steer well clear of anything to do with the Scott affair. Months later Wenham told Penrose that when it came to the Special Unit editorial control had been taken out of his hands.

In July the reporters were introduced to Ian Trethowan and had offered to brief him about the story. Trethowan, at that time Head of BBC radio, assigned his own reporter to the Special Unit. The future BBC Director-General was then convinced the investigation was important.

On the telephone next morning Lady Falkender asked Penrose what had gone wrong with the BBC's line of communication. She thought it had been carefully agreed with the Director-General that only Courtiour and himself should approach the ex-Prime Minister? Why had Hardiman Scott tried to reach Sir Harold, which was breaking the original agreement?

Penrose was apologetic, vainly trying to pass off the Chief Assistant's phone calls to Harold Wilson's political office as a

misunderstanding. Lady Falkender asked how the work was going and he said they were making good progress. And the BBC? The reporter blurred his answer, but added that the Corporation was still keen to continue. Lady Falkender sounded sceptical. "Personally, I doubt if you'll ever get anything on the air," she said candidly. Penrose disagreed and told her so confidently.

The reporters had suffered another setback. Their continuing interest in Scott's "missing" file had provoked an unusual reaction from the DHSS. Penrose, who had found the Cabinet Minister David Ennals easily approachable in the past, had written to him requesting an interview on the subject of Norman Scott's file. On 29 June 1976, he received a reply from the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, Roderick MacFarquhar. The MP explained that the Minister was unable to make time for an interview with the reporter but intended to see the Director-General of the BBC. In the meantime the BBC reporter should channel any questions to A. P. G. Brown, the Department's Director of Information. Penrose thought the request unusual but he contacted Mr Brown.

"May we have a briefing?" the reporter asked.

"This is for the Secretary of State to decide," said Brown plainly.

"How long do you imagine?"

"I cannot say," answered the Information Director. "Please do not imagine the matter has been shelved."

"This surely is unprecedented," said Penrose.

"Perhaps the situation is," said Brown. "I have instructed my staff that you should speak only to me."

The Minister had, however, already been in touch with the Director-General of the BBC.

On Wednesday 14 July 1976, unbeknown at the time to the Special Unit, a meeting had taken place at the House of Commons between the BBC's Director-General and the Labour Cabinet Minister David Ennals – the same Minister who had been kind enough to assist Peter Bessell in solving the problem of Norman Scott's Insurance cards in 1969. The subject they had agreed to discuss was Norman Scott's missing DHSS file and the BBC's enquiry into South Africa's alleged interference in British political life.

When the meeting began there were six men in the room: David Ennals and the Deputy Secretary of the DHSS, J. A. Atkinson,



Roderick MacFarquhar, MP, and a civil servant from the Department, Sir Charles Curran and his Chief Assistant, Peter Hardiman Scott. It was Hardiman Scott, the experienced Westminster correspondent, who had made notes of the meeting which later arrived at the Special Unit's office in Lime Grove.

A section of these notes which was naturally of some concern to the two reporters was that in which Hardiman Scott had summarised part of the conversation with the words: "Ennals was concerned about the contractual relations with Penrose and Courtiour, and D.G. explained that a contract was still being negotiated."

Hardiman Scott had gone on to record that the Cabinet Minister had "not been prepared to let Penrose and Courtiour see the file about his own Department's enquiry relating to Norman Scott", but he was prepared to let the Chief Assistant to the Director-General see it, on a confidential basis.

Nine days later the BBC's former Parliamentary Correspondent visited the DHSS headquarters in the Elephant and Castle district of London. He was able to report to the Director-General in the following terms:

NOTE OF CA-TO-DG'S VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY ON 23.7.76. TO INSPECT CONFIDENTIAL FILE ABOUT NORMAN SCOTT.

I went to the DHSS on Friday 23 July and examined the file of their investigation into allegations that a file relating to Norman Scott was missing and that efforts had been made to cover up this fact.

Admittedly nothing that I saw could explain the remark reported to have been made to Penrose and Courtiour by Barbara Castle, but having thoroughly examined a very fat file of an extremely full investigation I am convinced that:

1. there was no cover-up attempt
2. Jeremy Thorpe was never the employer of Norman Scott; and
3. the file was destroyed in March 1975, as part of the normal procedure of the Department.

This investigation by the D.H.S.S. was prompted by enquiries made by Penrose and Courtiour. The Scott file began after

correspondence from Peter Bessell to the Minister in August 1969. The file carried the number M.C.82530. M.C. stands for "Minister's Case", since the approach was originally to the Minister himself.

I saw appropriate Civil Service documents and noted that paragraph 61 of Part XI of Headquarters Circular 60/70 said that private office files, which includes M.C. files, should be destroyed after four years unless a longer period was specifically requested. From the documents I inspected it was evident that no longer period had been specified for this file. This number - M.C.82530 - was among a batch of 721 files destroyed in March 1975 and this was testified by the civil servant in the John Adam Street premises, who was responsible for clearing out files. It was confirmed by the person who is in charge of the file office and who says that there is no trace of file M.C.82530 or any other file relating to Scott or Bessell. Another person responsible for files marked "Not for Destruction", confirms that there is no such file relating to Scott, and Mr P. Lippiatt, Principal of the Chelsea Office, from which a safe was stolen on 8/9 January 1976, says that no confidential file relating to Scott was retained at Chelsea; thus the file was evidently destroyed well before the safe was stolen. In any event the official who was responsible for control of the stolen safe, says it contained no files at all. I have seen a list of its contents provided for the police and these were mostly Giro cheques, travel warrants, hotel vouchers and milk tokens. Norman Scott was interviewed some time just before 24 November 1969 and Scott then alleged a homosexual relationship with Thorpe and said that he had been employed by Thorpe and that Thorpe had agreed to stamp Scott's Insurance card, but that when he left this had not been done. Scott threatened to sell a story about this to Der Speigal [sic].

Yet another departmental official who interviewed Scott, recalls that Scott alleged that Thorpe held the card because of their personal relationship and not because he was Scott's employer. After further investigation it was decided that there was no record of employment by Thorpe and it was agreed to waive the arrears because it had been established to the Department's satisfaction that Thorpe had not been Scott's employer and because it was clear from Scott's financial position, that there was no hope of recovering the arrears. (This is a decision which is normally made at local or at most regional level and is not uncommon.)

Hardiman Scott had ended his note with the following advice:  
"My conclusion is that there is nothing to be gained or discovered by pursuing this line of enquiry any further."

It was not clear from the memo exactly what line of enquiry he meant but within days the two reporters were left in little doubt when, at a meeting attended by the Director-General's Chief Assistant, they were told to stop working on the Thorpe-Scott affair and spend more time following up some of the other leads that they were developing. They were disappointed and increasingly sceptical about the DHSS role in the affair. In his memo Hardiman Scott had accepted the assurances of the Department that not only the Minister's Case file had been destroyed but that no trace could be found of "any other file relating to Scott or Bessell", also that the person responsible for files marked "Not for Destruction" had no such files relating to Scott.

It seemed incredible to the two reporters that on such a delicate matter the DHSS should not have a single file left. Courtiour noted that in the memo written by Hardiman Scott the name of Josiffe was never used but, in view of the large-scale investigation carried out by the Department, the two reporters discounted the possibility that there had been a simple omission to check under Scott's previous name. If indeed the Department no longer had any material on Scott, Courtiour reflected that the DHSS must be about the only Government Department that did not have, since so many officials of one kind or another had shown a special interest in his affairs.

David Ennals was not the only person to approach the Director-General directly about their investigation. Jeremy Thorpe had spoken with Sir Charles Curran and an exchange of correspondence had also come into their hands. However, the Director-General would not allow his reporters to approach Mr Thorpe. He gave no reasons for his decision.

The following week Andrew Todd, the Editor of Television News, expressed his own fears about the Special Unit's work.

"You've produced extraordinary information," he said "but you're like puppy dogs who keep bringing back sticks. The sticks always seem to have some connection with Thorpe."

Later that day, however, Alan Protheroe, the deputy head of Television News, told Penrose that he was unhappy about the attitude towards the enquiry of some of his colleagues. Keep on working, he said. He was going to his bank with a letter stating his

view of the situation: he insisted this conversation of theirs was logged in the Red File notes. There is a hint of censorship in the air, he said. He wanted the Director-General to be aware of what was going on.

"I want it made absolutely clear," Protheroe explained, "that I want to press on with the story whatever others may feel. The story must and can be made public by the Corporation."

On 22 July Penrose had entered into the Red File notes a transcription of a phone conversation he had had with Peter Bessell. The notes spelt out a complicated murder plan which the former MP knew about. Worried BBC executives had questioned the two reporters on whether the Corporation would have to use the material first or whether there would be other ways of making the information public.

It was against this background that Penrose and Courtiour first discovered how the BBC proposed to formalise its "contractual relations" with them. The Special Unit had already been in existence for two months when on 24 July, without prior discussion, they received identical contracts through the post.

They were each three pages long and identical. They set out the terms under which the two freelance journalists would continue working with the Special Unit. Both men had signed BBC contracts before but these were distinctly unusual. They were retrospective and would run from 1 June 1976 to 30 November 1976. Clause 2 began: "Your services shall be rendered to the BBC to undertake research work for a Special Project enquiring into attempts by South African interest, public or private, to intervene in British affairs, especially insofar as they may involve the Liberal Party and the personal life of Mr Jeremy Thorpe and his associates . . . and you shall take all instructions regarding the performance of your work under this Agreement from the Director-General or his nominee."

This seemed at first glance quite gratifying. It appeared that they were positively required to look into the Liberal Party aspects of the story, so why had certain executives warned them off that area?

Clause 4, however, read: "All the material and information acquired in the course of undertaking this Special Project shall remain the exclusive property of the BBC and may not be published or disclosed by you in any form without the previous written consent of the BBC either during or after the termination of this Agreement."

This struck the two reporters as giving the BBC very far-reaching powers quite beyond anything they had ever seen before in any of their normal freelance contracts.

And what if the warnings they had already received from some executives were correct? If the BBC chose not to publish their material, whether for editorial or for hidden political reasons, could this clause be used as an instrument of censorship?

So the reporters went to see two top BBC administrators in order to raise their objections to certain clauses. J. G. H. Wadsworth and P. F. Wickham had been asked to supervise the signing of the contracts by 4 August at the latest. The administrators explained they had not been told the specific nature of the Special Unit's enquiries or about their connection with Harold Wilson, which made the business of discussing contracts with them rather difficult.

Penrose suggested it would therefore be a good idea if their own lawyer examined the contracts on their behalf.

"I'm not happy about your showing these contracts to a lawyer," Wadsworth responded briskly. "That is something which is excluded in Clause 6 of the contract: You must not give any information to anyone about this Agreement."

The reporters were astonished and even more suspicious. They knew now that their contractual position had been discussed by the Director-General and David Ennals. Surely they could consult with a lawyer? Didn't any person have the right to consult his legal adviser in conditions of absolute privacy? Wickham felt on consideration that he did not object to the reporters' talking to their own lawyer in conditions of privilege as long as they were quick. But Wadsworth suggested they should first "mask off" certain sensitive clauses before passing the agreements to their solicitor.

The reporters were again rather taken aback, and again Wickham agreed such precautions might be unnecessary.

James Comyn, QC, strongly advised Courtiour and Penrose against signing the BBC contracts without first making amendments which would allow them one day to publish a book if they so wished. Their solicitor, Peter George, agreed.

The point about future publication of the information was not a new or irrelevant one. Back in May, not long after their first meeting with Harold Wilson, one BBC executive had suggested they might eventually write a book about their investigations. There was in fact nothing at all unusual about this suggestion:

many people wrote books while working for the BBC which arose out of their researches for a programme.

A few days later, however, the BBC made it clear that they were not prepared to negotiate any important amendments at all.

Sitting in his office in the presence of Wadsworth and Wickham, Desmond Taylor put his viewpoint strongly to the two reporters: "Sign the contracts or you don't work on the Special Unit any longer."

The next morning Courtiour rang through to Taylor's office and confirmed that reluctantly they could not sign without amendments. But both reporters fell into an immediate depression: they had lost marvellous resources – travel facilities, telephones, even the use of a BBC car. And they had been told to stop working immediately on the Special Unit. It seemed hard to believe that they were, in effect, being run out of the Corporation after working for it for several years. When they called in at the Unit's office a few days later to tidy up their effects, the door had been fitted with new locks. An astonished colleague, John Pencyate, who shared an adjoining office, discovered that he too had been locked out of his office as a result.

On 28 August 1976, Courtiour and Penrose wrote to Sir Charles requesting a further meeting with him. They said: "One of the things that does occur to us, and we very much hope you will not mind us telling you this, is that people with a particular bias may have been trying to exert pressure in view of the serious implications of the information which we have received and its origins."

In writing this they were thinking of certain information that had been passed to them about the intentions of executives within the BBC. But they also had in mind the possibility of outside pressure perhaps of a more subtle kind.

Sir Charles replied to their letter at some length on 7 September. He admitted that his major concern had indeed been to avoid exposing the BBC to criticism. "It seemed to me," he said, "that the BBC could not lay itself open to the potential accusation that it was allowing public money to be spent on collecting information of a delicate kind which might be published in ways beyond the BBC's own control, and in a manner which could raise questions about the propriety of the expenditures concerned." But the other point to which Sir Charles replied was not quite the one that the reporters had been making, because he wrote: "You suggest that there may have been some improper influence brought to bear in

order to prevent the continuance of your enquiries on behalf of the BBC. I can assure you that this is not the case."

On the contrary, the reason why Penrose and Courtiour had felt unable to sign the special contract was not that it prevented "the continuance of their enquiries" but that – potentially – it sewed up whatever they might discover. The Director-General, they noticed, did not discuss any influence that might have been brought to bear in that direction.

On 30 September, the BBC's Press Office issued a statement that it had withdrawn "its offer of contract work" to two freelance journalists "who approached the BBC in May claiming to have special information about the South African interference allegations". Seeming to contradict all Sir Charles Curran's explanations about possible criticism of the BBC for financial irresponsibility, the statement said: "Given the costs of present-day journalism, whether in newspaper or in broadcasting, the expenditure has been modest."

The rupture with the BBC interrupted their pursuit of the DHSS for information. But on 2 February 1977 Penrose again wrote to the Minister requesting an interview. On 2 March he received a reply refusing an interview. On 26 March Penrose wrote finally to David Ennals:

"My colleague Roger Courtiour and I feel it only right to tell you that the statements we have been given by the DHSS at all levels are at variance with the facts discovered by us after long and exhaustive enquiries. In fact, we trust you will not be offended when we say that we no longer have confidence in DHSS statements we have been given because we believe them to be inaccurate."

Mr Ennals's Permanent Private Secretary replied this time almost at once. On 6 April he wrote: "Mr Ennals has asked me to thank you for your letter of 26 March. He has nothing to add to what I said in my letter to you of 2 March."

But the reporters had at last gained an insight into the mystery of the missing file which gave them cause to feel that they were justified in writing to David Ennals in such strong terms. Their information had come from an unexpected source, Lady Falkender.

Lady Falkender – or Marcia Williams as she then was – had been Harold Wilson's Political Secretary ever since he became Prime Minister in 1964. In that capacity she had occupied a unique position of trust at 10 Downing Street, and although newspapers

had sometimes portrayed her as casting an evil spell over the Premier's office with her strong will, there seemed to be general agreement about her intelligence and fierce personal loyalty to Harold Wilson. She had, as far as the reporters could tell, played little part in the early stages of their contact with Sir Harold, but later on they were to have several lengthy meetings with her.

On 22 March 1977, weighed down with briefcases bulging with the documentary evidence they had collected, they had arrived at Lady Falkender's home in Wyndham Mews, which she shared with her sister, Peggy Field, who had been Mrs Wilson's private secretary.

Lady Falkender had asked them what they had been up to, for she understood that their investigation was not turning out in quite the way that either they or Sir Harold had expected.

They had launched themselves hesitantly at first but then with growing confidence into an explanation of their findings, supporting each part of their account with the relevant documents and transcripts. This particular session stretched over twelve hours without a break. When they raised the subject of Norman Scott's missing DHSS file, Lady Falkender confirmed what Sir Harold had already told them earlier. Indeed she had examined the files herself very carefully. The Prime Minister had wanted to see Scott's Social Security file, but the Department had been somewhat tardy in supplying it to Number 10.

"I instructed the Department to find the file and there was a long delay," Lady Falkender recalled. "It was supposed to be at the Chiswick branch and then it had been transferred to Marylebone or somewhere else! But it had not really; one branch told a lie about the next office."

The Political Secretary explained that she had been handling Civil Service files for many years. In general everything was a matter of routine but the Scott files seemed to present problems for the DHSS. She could not accept that a file had gone missing, and Barbara Castle, the Social Security Minister at the time, had been asked to make her own enquiries. The Secretary of State in turn detailed a political aide – the civil servant whom the reporters had interviewed – to make a separate report for Number 10. If top DHSS officials were holding back sensitive information, it was hoped he would be able to prise the Scott material out of the system. Thus the Prime Minister's request for Scott's file had set two rival enquiries into motion.

In time the Scott files had turned up at Number 10. The material that had finally come from the DHSS had been supplemented by an appreciation by the political aide. Lady Falkender was the first person to read her way through the letters, documents and other papers. There was not just one file in fact, but several. They were bound in green folders. One of them, she recalled, was the Department's confidential political digest of the Scott-Thorpe case.

The reporters began to understand now how Hardiman Scott had come to believe the matter was of no further interest. When they had been with the BBC they had understood there to be only one file and had assumed that when Sir Harold told them not to believe that the file was missing, he was referring to a single file. The Department had obviously presented the Director-General's Chief Assistant with overwhelming evidence that a single file had been destroyed and his conclusions were presumably based on the assumption that all relevant material had been destroyed in that file.

Lady Falkender, who had many years of experience in these matters, explained the frustration of dealing with the Department. It was no use just asking questions, she explained, they had to be the right questions, otherwise relevant information could never be extracted. Both she and Harold Wilson were convinced that material which they had requested – and which they knew existed from references in the files that they had seen – was being withheld from them.

"The political aide had also digested the whole case," Lady Falkender said. "It set out all the political ramifications. In other words, what I would think now would be a very secret document. Something that couldn't really be weeded out. You might weed out the other four but you couldn't weed out the digest.

"If you had looked at those files," she said, "you knew someone had been up to no good. For example, you could see that officials had cooperated with outside sources to stop the Scott case coming to court at all, automatically."

Sir Harold's Political Secretary believed this might have two possible explanations. There might be people both outside and inside Whitehall who wanted to provoke a national scandal for their own political ends: over the years they could have deliberately held back any court prosecutions until they felt the time was right. Others, of course, might simply want to protect Jeremy Thorpe from public disgrace.

"That is why I tended to come to his rescue," said Lady Falkender. "And so did Sir Harold. It was a gut reaction on his part, I am sure."

To their astonishment Lady Falkender said that copies of the files had been made and kept by Sir Harold and could possibly be referred to if needed.

The reporters were eager to check the information Lady Falkender had seen with the latest piece of news from Norman Scott. On 4 March 1977, Mr H. Vowles, the assistant manager of the Barnstaple DHSS office, had written to Scott in reply to his request for information about his National Insurance cards. The letter explained that in the year 1961/2 a total of 27 contributions had been paid and in the year 1962/3 21 contributions. Mr Vowles had said: "I cannot now say by whom these contributions were paid."

The DHSS and its officials seemed therefore to be at odds about who had paid Norman Scott's contributions: Peter Hardiman Scott had been assured that Mr Thorpe was not responsible but Mr Vowles was unable to say.

For Lady Falkender there was no doubt and she told the reporters emphatically that it had been Jeremy Thorpe. He had been responsible for stamping Scott's cards – she had seen evidence with her own eyes. It therefore followed that when the Liberal leader denied being Scott's employer or ever having held his Insurance cards, he had not been telling the truth.

"I know it's true," she declared firmly, "because that was one of the first things I queried when I first saw the files."

No wonder that in the atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty which existed inside 10 Downing Street the material in the DHSS files was seen by Harold Wilson as a political threat. The BBC, too, found it difficult to reconcile what it had been told by the DHSS with the disturbing information it had received from its reporters.

On 23 September 1976, the Director-General of the BBC had written confidentially to Sir Harold expressing concern at the "unsavoury" nature of some of the material which Penrose and Courtiour had been coming up with and explaining that it did not look as if contracts with them would be signed. As an alternative, Sir Charles had suggested two other journalists whom he would be happy to introduce to Sir Harold as the BBC intended to keep the Special Unit going. The former Prime Minister had said no to this

idea a few days later, and confirmed to a *Daily Mirror* reporter that he had no particular relations now with the BBC.

At the same time he had given Penrose and Courtiour a message that an independent television company would no doubt jump at the chance of continuing with their investigation.

Under Gordon Carr the Special Unit had pressed on at the BBC for several months before finally being wound up. Carr told Penrose and Courtiour he was philosophical about this. Frankly when the decision was made at Broadcasting House he had not been in the least surprised.

"The information which you were bringing to the BBC, and the Harold Wilson link, became something of an embarrassment to some people in the BBC hierarchy," he explained on the phone. "When you both left it was an immense relief to the Corporation. I think they're just as relieved now that I'm back in the newsroom."

Penrose asked Carr why he thought the BBC had become so worried.

"You see," he replied, "even if our information all turned out to be true, it set an organisation like the BBC so many problems. The overwhelming reaction was one of intense worry, either way. It involved too many difficult factors. The truth wasn't necessarily the overwhelming consideration."

## Chapter 19

In the weeks following their departure from the BBC, Courtiour and Penrose continued to feel uneasy about their future as working journalists. Before, when obtaining information or asking for appointments, they had been entitled to say that they represented the world's largest broadcasting corporation, and its name and reputation had opened doors for them. But now they felt naked and unarmed, having to approach people on their own behalf. In the meantime a literary agent Gordon Fielden had finalised an arrangement for Secker & Warburg to publish their findings in the form of a book. Tom Rosenthal, Secker's managing director, saw that their discoveries could eventually be an important matter of public interest, but he had requested from the moment they signed contracts that his firm's name should not be mentioned. Secker & Warburg wanted no premature publicity, nor the risk that political or commercial pressure might be brought to bear on them.

While Courtiour brought his BBC expenses up to date for the last time, Penrose went off to buy a second-hand car to replace the Ford which he had returned to the BBC. The 1976 annual Liberal Party Assembly was opening at the seaside resort of Llandudno in North Wales and they wanted to go there and meet several of the delegates who would be attending. A few days later, the now independent reporters drove towards Wales in a second-hand Volkswagen. It suited their new circumstances exactly. Their advance from the publisher looked handsome on paper but was only just adequate to cover the expenses that they knew they would now have to meet out of their own pockets.

During the long drive, they asked themselves whether they had been right to leave the BBC and press on with the story alone.

Sir Charles Curran wrote to them as late as 7 September that if they wished to return to the Special Unit there was nothing to stop them. But they would, of course, have to sign the contracts which he had prepared for them back in July, and that was the insuperable condition.

On Wednesday 15 September the Liberal Party's Assembly

opened under a blaze of public attention. It was being held in the wake of the worst publicity and internal dissensions in the Party since its birth more than a century before, but the seven hundred delegates who crowded into the Pier Pavilion were in a defiant and self-righteous mood. They looked upon the Norman Scott affair as an attack on their Party as well as on a popular leader whom most of them continued to admire.

For the majority of delegates, wild and unproven allegations about Jeremy Thorpe's private life were no reason for ousting the respected politician, and they were glad that he had survived the storm and remained in the important post of Liberal Party spokesman on Foreign Affairs. And when he and his wife Marion walked onto the stage in the middle of a debate a murmur of sympathy and approval spread around the hall. Moments later, delegates could hold back their spontaneous affection no longer and broke into tumultuous applause. Slowly Thorpe rose to his feet, taking his wife's hand as she joined him, smiling shyly, to receive their acclaim.

Watching from the balcony above, where most of the Press were assembled, Penrose and Courtiour wondered what the delegates would have made of the enquiries they had so far completed. Somehow, the Assembly seemed unreal, its delegates caught up in a fervour which said clearly that Jeremy Thorpe was still the hero of the day among ordinary Liberals.

But even here at the Liberals' own gathering two different worlds existed. While speaker after speaker came to the rostrum, the ex-BBC men left the hall to talk to the professional politicians behind the scenes. Here, in the privacy of a hotel room, they could talk about aspects of the private affair which still held the attention of those in the know at Llandudno.

The reporters began by having breakfast on Thursday 16 September with the burly 350-lb MP from Rochdale, Cyril Smith. As the Liberals' Chief Whip he had been brought into the enquiry which had taken place inside the Parliamentary Party earlier in the summer, and Penrose had already spoken to him briefly at the beginning of their investigation.

He began talking frankly about matters inside the party which gravely disturbed him.

Then the MP turned to the Thorpe-Scott story. He said that early in January 1976 the Liberal leader had warned him that a man called Scott was soon to appear in court over an incident

involving a shot dog. Thorpe feared that the man might allege publicly that he had had a homosexual affair with him. He made clear that while there would, of course, be no truth in such allegations, they could result in damaging publicity for the Party. Smith said he laughed at such a remote possibility and thought little of the matter until the story became unexpectedly public for the first time on 29 January.

The Chief Whip had shown immediate sympathy for Jeremy Thorpe's problems. When the Liberal leader had mentioned that Scott had a record of psychiatric trouble, he had readily agreed to make certain that the Devon police also knew such information. In fact, with David Steel he had later arranged a meeting with the Labour Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins. The two men had then provided Jenkins with some of the background to the Scott case and they had found him equally sympathetic to Jeremy's predicament.

On Monday 3 February 1976 the Chief Whip had been with the Liberal leader at the House of Commons when the Prime Minister had suddenly walked into the room. The two politicians were astonished: traditionally Prime Ministers do not visit MPs in their rooms. Harold Wilson had then asked Jeremy Thorpe to join him in his private office at the House later that afternoon.

That same day the Chief Whip had then asked his leader what the Prime Minister had wanted. He said Thorpe was hesitant at first. He had been forced to press him for an answer; if the meeting had any bearing on the Liberal Party crisis he said he should be informed. According to Smith, Thorpe had then said the news was good. The Prime Minister would blame the South Africans for the Scott rumpus. It was on 3 February, Courtiour remembered, that Kenneth Wyatt had first approached Peter Hain with his allegations about a South African plot. On 9 March Harold Wilson had made his celebrated speech attacking South Africa for the smears then circulating around Jeremy Thorpe's party.

Cyril Smith made the former Prime Minister's motives sound like little more than shallow political expediency; a cynical ploy perhaps to help out a Parliamentary colleague in trouble.

The reporters were momentarily stunned by what they had just learned. What if the Labour Premier had made his allegations about South Africa as a mere Parliamentary smokescreen to protect the Liberals? And for what purpose? To make the Liberal leader and his party more sympathetic to the Wilson Government



and keep them in power? Or simply for the sake of the friendship which had grown up between the two political leaders?

If that were the case, of course, the reporters could equally have been misled by the former Premier. Yet why should Sir Harold then have asked two investigative journalists to make enquiries behind the scenes? If his allegations about South African interference were groundless, there would be no point. In any case Cyril Smith knew nothing of the other matters which Sir Harold had raised with them and they therefore cast his cynical suggestion aside.

The MP changed the subject and began talking about his colleague Emlyn Hooson, who had told him he felt he might be in personal danger.

"Emlyn went so far as to say to me: 'If anything happens to me I want an enquiry. I believe it *can* happen and I believe I may be the next one.'"

A few hours later Courtiour asked Emlyn Hooson if it was true that he felt he might be in some personal danger. The barrister was hesitant at first, avoiding a direct reply. But then he agreed that he had confided his fears to Cyril Smith. People had died in what he had heard were somewhat puzzling circumstances.

"There was that woman Mrs Parry-Jones," he said in a near whisper. "I've heard she threw herself over some cliffs not far from here." He went on to speak about another death which had occurred in Liberal Party circles some time before which should, he felt, be carefully re-examined.

No wonder the reporters found it hard to concentrate on the debates that were taking place inside the public assembly when in private two of the Party's most prominent figures were talking obsessively about mysterious deaths and one of them even expressing fears for his own life. If they themselves were feeling disorientated now that they were working on their own, how much more unsure of themselves the Liberal politicians seemed to be, haunted as they were by a spectre that must now seem to them to be clamouring to get out. They had that kind of uncontrollable urge to speak about what was troubling them, but they dreaded to express it in public. Cyril Smith even retreated into a hospital for a time for observation.

As they came away from Llandudno they went on discussing the muddled tales they had heard behind the scenes. But among people who knew only part of the story the confusion was perhaps

hardly surprising. In the Scott affair, separating fact from fantasy was no easy task and the two reporters guessed that there were further months of hard work in front of them during which they must come to grips with some of the less tangible aspects of Norman Scott's allegations.

The covering-up process that had gone on, apparently, ever since the time of the alleged relationship between Thorpe and Scott had had an effect on national and international issues. It was now important for them to look into some of the wider allegations surrounding Scott and see whether they had any basis in fact, so that the tremendous political implications of the story could no longer be obscured by simply labelling the whole affair "unreal".

Back at their first meeting with him on 20 May, Norman Scott had made no secret of his nervous state. He had explained how he had sought the help of doctors who had prescribed drugs to calm him down and get him to sleep. Was Scott hallucinating so much that his brain invented happenings that had not really taken place? This accusation had been made several times about him and, in view of his dependence on drugs and alcohol, the reporters themselves had continued to be highly suspicious about the stories he told. They had however made every effort to check his claims by discussing them with responsible persons.

Now that they had left the BBC the reporters wanted to discuss their investigation with Jeremy Thorpe but the MP had decided not to meet them. After writing to him at the House of Commons they also met him by accident in Devon, not far from his cottage at Cobbaton. When they introduced themselves to him he again decided not to discuss their findings with them.

One of the first people they approached was Jeremy Ferguson, a West Country solicitor who had originally met Scott in 1974. He struck them as a level-headed person and they asked him about his impressions of Scott during that period. He admitted that like so many others he had at first found the young man rather odd. "He seemed," he said, "to be living in a world of fantasy. We had these extraordinary series of incidents which few people would have taken seriously and yet in time they appeared to have a foundation in fact. Anything which Scott told me and which I had the chance of checking seemed to be accurate."

Ferguson's view of his former client was one they were to hear expressed in almost identical terms by a variety of people.

One example of Scott's unlikely stories which, rather sur-

prisingly, turned out to be true when Penrose and Courtiour looked into it was his claim that he had been hypnotised by a Church of England vicar. In the autumn of 1973 a local doctor had sent Scott for hypnosis to the Reverend Frederick Pennington, the parish priest at All Saints Church in North Molton in Devon. Pennington was an amateur hypnotist, who, although medically unqualified, had practised hypnotherapy on many of the villagers in his parish.

When Courtiour and Penrose met him, Mr Pennington seemed at first almost hostile towards the man he had once had in his care. "Scott is a common blackmailer, don't you think?" he asked dismissively.

Courtior felt this opening was somehow out of character for a Church of England vicar who would normally be expected to err on the side of charity.

"I'm not taking Scott's side," Courtiour retorted, "but nobody yet seems to have any proof that the man is a common blackmailer. Have you?"

The question was put rather sharply and the priest gave no answer, merely shaking his head in surprise. For a few moments there was silence in the room. Courtiour's sudden and uncharacteristic outburst seemed to have startled Pennington, as if someone had stood up in his church and told him that he was only reciting his words without considering what they meant. It was in this room that he had spent hours talking to local people and putting them under hypnosis, and presumably he felt that there was some validity in what he was doing. Or had he not succeeded in reaching into Scott's unconscious mind? Certainly when he looked up now his tone had changed.

"I heard his life story," he said more calmly, "and I took it for granted that everything he told me was true. One does, you see. They're re-living certain experiences. This is the purpose of hypnosis in many cases."

Pennington had later met Jeremy Thorpe, in January 1974, about a month before the first of the two General Elections which took place that year.

"I told Thorpe candidly what Scott had told me," he confided, speaking quickly. "He denied Scott's story was true."

Driving on towards the small town of South Molton, Courtiour and Penrose found it difficult to explain why a qualified doctor would send his patient to an amateur hypnotist for medical

treatment. Mr Pennington had said that Scott was sent to him by a doctor from South Molton called Ronald Gleadle, who had sent him a number of other patients to be hypnotised. Gleadle had at that time been in practice at the South Molton Health Centre, but he had later gone to work for a pharmaceutical company at Welwyn in Hertfordshire.

The two reporters visited the Health Centre and met Dr Richard Norris who had practised there at the same time as Ronald Gleadle. They asked him if it were possible that patients could have been sent to an amateur hypnotist.

"My word," he said, apparently bewildered by the thought, "the Reverend Pennington actually carried out exorcisms upstairs here at the Health Centre. On Monday night you could hear the moans and groans and the howlings going on. It was horrifying. I didn't go and look: perhaps I should have done! Ron Gleadle was enthusiastic about the psychiatric benefits of hypnosis," he said. "Frankly I kept myself very much away from it all."

In May 1973, Norman Scott had walked into the Centre and put himself on Dr Gleadle's National Health list. And Scott had soon mentioned something to his new doctor about his affair with the local MP. He revealed to the doctor that he had received small sums of money from Peter Bessell, who had once been an MP in the neighbouring county of Cornwall.

According to Dr Gleadle's later account to the police, Scott had claimed that in the past he had contributed a large sum of money to the Liberal Party. He said he had been left a legacy and had passed a large part of it on to them. Now that he was in dire financial straits, he had told Dr Gleadle, he believed the Party should help him in return.

And in his statement to the police, Dr Gleadle wrote: "Mr Scott showed me a file of documents which comprised letters, mostly written by Mr Bessell or by his secretary relating to payments which had been made to Mr Scott."

Shortly after sending his patient to Mr Pennington for hypnosis, Dr Gleadle also discussed Scott's problems with a married couple called Rowley who were on his list of patients. Kennard Rowley was a mechanic with a busy used car business on the outskirts of Barnstaple, and he and his wife Joy had first met Scott in the summer of 1973 when he was living in South Molton. They both got on well with him.

Rowley told Courtiour that he had met Jeremy Thorpe, liked

the man and thought him a good politician. He had also known Norman Scott and frankly he cared nothing about any relationship the two men might have had in the past. But he did think Scott had been unfairly treated.

Probably the main reason why Rowley got on so well with Scott was that he liked dogs.

When Scott was living at his cottage on the moors he borrowed a couple of Rowley's dogs and later actually bought two from him.

By the time Dr Gleadle had spoken to them, the Rowleys had already got to hear Scott's story.

And he had shown them letters and documents from the file which he kept hidden away at his cottage.

"Norman would get depressed and speak about suicide," said Rowley. "He was pumping drugs into himself and he used to shake nervously: it was pitiful to see sometimes." Then early in February 1974, Dr Gleadle had arrived at the Rowleys' house, carrying Norman Scott's file of letters. Rowley said, "He asked me if I wanted to help Norman to buy some horses and rent some stables. He said there were people who would certainly like the letters returned to them. I didn't take much notice. I would help Norman, of course, but not by giving him money."

Courtiour asked Rowley if he could remember the date when this unusual suggestion was put forward, and the motor mechanic said he remembered it very well because he was going up to London the next day for Cruft's Dog Show. It must have been 7 February.

That was a coincidence, Courtiour thought to himself: because Thursday 7 February 1974 was the day on which the Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath had announced that a General Election was to take place three weeks later. It was odd that the subject of money in connection with Scott's letters should have come up at this particular time. Without any doubt the continued presence of such letters in the North Devon constituency, along with their talkative owner, was a source of worry. So whose idea had it been that Dr Gleadle should be carrying the letters around with him and talking about buying horses for Scott? Ken Rowley knew that, for fear that they could be stolen, Scott normally made a practice of keeping all his documents hidden away in his cottage and never letting them out of his hands. How then had Ronald Gleadle come to be holding them when he visited the Rowleys on the day of the election announcement?

During the trial of Andrew Newton, of which Penrose and Courtiour had now purchased part of the official transcript, Dr Gleadle was not actually called as a witness but his name was mentioned in evidence several times. In answer to questions about his medical treatment which were put to him by Patrick Back, QC, the defence counsel, Scott replied that he was being prescribed very large doses of drugs.

Mr Justice Lawson interrupted him to ask: "You were being poisoned?" and Scott replied: "Yes, I think so. Slowly. I know it sounds totally fantastic. I was having 160 milligrams of Librium a day and 40 Mogadon at night. This is quite a heavy dose over the year and a half and I was afraid of that."

Courtiour and Penrose were curious about the drug doses that had been mentioned. At Scott's cottage in Combe Martin they had seen medicine bottles which showed that the amount of Librium prescribed was indeed as high as 160 milligrams. Those particular dosages of Librium had however been prescribed by a Dr Cracknell from the Bideford Health Centre and not by Dr Gleadle. Scott had apparently turned to Dr Cracknell for help shortly after he became disillusioned with Ron Gleadle.

Penrose called Dr Cracknell and asked if he would confirm that he had prescribed Scott 160 milligrams of Librium a day. The doctor said immediately that he would confirm it.

"Scott told me that his previous doctor, Dr Gleadle, had prescribed him 160 milligrams a day," he said openly. "I gave him the same amount. I found Scott truthful and there was no reason why I should doubt his word in such matters."

When the reporter consulted Roche Products, the manufacturers of Librium, a research chemist told him that the highest amount they recommended was 100 milligrams of Librium a day. A normal daily dose for a patient would be somewhere in the region of 30 milligrams. 160 milligrams would not poison anybody, the chemist said, only make him feel drowsy, particularly if they were taken in conjunction with other drugs and quantities of alcohol. In fact, this description of the effects of the large dosage tallied very well with the story that Scott told in the witness box at the trial. He maintained that when Dr Gleadle called at his home to take away the file of documents, he had taken the prescribed drugs and was in such a dazed state that he could only agree to let the doctor do whatever he wished.

Penrose and Courtiour now began their efforts to contact Dr

Gleadle himself. Although they were managing to put together many items of information in their investigation, the process was by no means easy. One significant aspect of the story so far was the number of people who did not wish to be interviewed, even if they had played only a minor role in the curious events. Dr Gleadle was one person who had persistently succeeded in shaking newsmen off his tail.

However, eventually he agreed to meet the two reporters in the presence of a Medical Defence Union lawyer and, although on two occasions he still failed to turn up for his appointment, on 28 June 1976 he finally arrived at the solicitor's office in London.

Clearly unhappy that the meeting was taking place at all, Dr Gleadle nevertheless answered most of the questions which had been submitted to the lawyer at the beginning of their conversation. His replies filled in some important gaps in the reporters' researches, particularly when he confirmed the statement he had made to the Devon police in the summer of 1976, of which Penrose and Courtiour were later given a copy.

Dr Gleadle agreed that it was at his suggestion that Norman Scott had gone to Mr Pennington for hypnotherapy.

About the manner in which he had obtained Scott's precious file of letters, the two reporters reminded him about his patient's story.

"Dr Gleadle arrived at night for my file," Scott had said. "I was in bed having taken my sleeping pills and I was totally unable to know what was going on. He walked in and said that he must have these documents and his words were: 'The sky's the limit!' and I said, 'Oh Ron, I don't know what to do. Do what you think is the best. They're in the dressing table, the chest of drawers: and you do what you think is best.'"

Was Scott's claim true that Dr Gleadle had prescribed 160 milligrams of Librium a day, and 40 milligrams of Mogadon to be taken at night?

The MDU lawyer replied that such high dosages were unlikely to have been prescribed and Dr Gleadle quickly agreed. But the doctor did not rule out completely that large amounts of Librium had been taken by his patient. He stressed that Scott had been in an agitated, nervous state.

At the end of the meeting Penrose and Courtiour were still left wondering what Dr Gleadle could have meant by that remark "The sky's the limit!" which he had made according to Scott. There was certainly evidence that Scott had suddenly been in possession

of a large sum of money shortly after the doctor had visited Kennard and Joy Rowley with the letters in his hand. The reporters had also obtained copies of bank statements showing that on 28 February 1974, the day of the General Election, Dr Gleadle had gone to a branch of Lloyds Bank in South Molton and opened two accounts in the name of Norman Scott. One was a current account into which he paid £1,500; the other a deposit account for £1,000. Was it Dr Gleadle himself who had paid £2,500 for the model's files, or had Scott sold his letters to someone else with Dr Gleadle acting as agent?

After the transaction, whatever form it took, had taken place, the reporters also knew that a delighted Dr Gleadle had then called at the North Molton vicarage to tell Mr Pennington the good news. The priest had told them that the doctor had hurried into the house and waved a cheque at him. He recalled the incident well.

The vicar said the money was apparently intended to be used to help Scott set up in business in North Molton. He could rent some stables locally and buy some horses. The £2,500 would provide him with a new start in life.

Courtior asked the clergyman whether he had not enquired where the money had come from.

"I must be naive," replied Pennington, his eyes directed down at the carpet. "It may sound strange to you chaps, but I didn't ask. Ron didn't tell me where the money came from. It was just to help Norman."

The two reporters were therefore faced with a puzzle. Why should Scott suddenly be paid £2,500 for a file of letters which was not unique, in the sense that several copies already existed, notably in the hands of the Liberal Party, the police, the DHSS, Gordon Winter, the *People* newspaper, and Winter's unspecified Intelligence friends?

Surely the unknown purchaser was not yet another potential blackmailer who might wish to exert pressure on individual members of the Liberal Party? A man who wanted to take advantage of the sensitive election period?

But the priest repeatedly stressed that the £2,500 must have been provided by "friends" who merely wished to help Scott start a new life. That sounded like a plausible explanation, but who exactly were these charitable friends?

Dr Gleadle admitted at his meeting with the reporters that Scott had not initially asked for his file to be sold and he had certainly

not offered it for sale to anybody. The approach had really come, he said, from the solicitor in Barnstaple, Michael Barnes. But how had Ronald Gleadle come to be in touch with the man who was Jeremy Thorpe's solicitor in the West Country?

Dr Gleadle said he had originally gone to see Barnes at his offices for medical and other reasons: "My principal reason for doing so," as he said in his statement to the police, "was that, at the time, Mr Scott had become obsessional about these matters and I felt it would assist me in treating him if I could discover whether the allegations were true or whether they were fantasies which he believed or had made up."

Dr Gleadle described how a stranger had given him the £2,500 cheque which was in his name because he knew Scott had no bank account. And how the man had said he would return to Michael Barnes' house where he was staying in Barnstaple and destroy the Scott papers in the lawyer's Aga stove.

But Barnes, according to Dr Gleadle's solicitor, had contradicted this assertion of the doctor's that the two men had met at his office. And when Penrose telephoned him on 8 June he said simply that he had no comment to make and put the receiver down.

If Michael Barnes had arranged the meeting between Dr Gleadle and the mystery man who paid the £2,500, then it seemed reasonable to assume, as Dr Gleadle had done, that the solicitor would also know the identity of the person and the reason for the payment. However, if Barnes chose not to reveal his role in the affair, it seemed that there was little that Dr Gleadle could do to substantiate his version of events.

On the surface it appeared that Scott had been more than happy to receive and spend his sudden windfall from unknown "friends". But the notion that a friendly anonymous benefactor had simply handed Scott a generous gift seemed unlikely. So was it possible that the money had come from the sort of right-wing "slush funds" to which Sir Harold Wilson had referred so often at Lord North Street?

## Chapter 20

Penrose and Courtiour had long since realised that no single piece of information, even if it emanated from the former British Prime Minister, would be the master-key to all the many unanswered questions raised so far by their enquiries. Sir Harold himself, when they discussed their progress with him, could only urge them to keep pressing ahead. "I'm sure you'll find that Scott is somehow part of the conspiracy," he said emphatically, repeating his belief at successive meetings. So the two reporters stuck to their task of plotting all the little movements that took place around Norman Scott and seeing whether they fitted into Sir Harold's scenario of a South African smear campaign.

In any other story, of course, with the letters apparently burned, the money spent, and the political ends all nicely sewn up at the beginning of 1974, that would have been that. But as usual Penrose and Courtiour found themselves staring at a picture rather like those that atomic physicists pore over for traces of colliding particles. In these pictures, the decaying particles never quite seem to disappear entirely: whenever any two of them meet, another little shower of three or four is produced, bouncing off at odd angles from the original impact.

In this case the sub-particles produced were numerous. Thanks to Norman Scott's magnanimous, or feckless, squandering of the £2,500 almost as quickly as it had arrived, his thoughts turned back to his missing file. Without it there seemed to be nothing but his word to back up his allegations against Thorpe and the Liberal Party, and, not knowing that it had been destroyed, he first asked Dr Gleadle to get it back for him.

But the general practitioner, of course, no longer had it. Nor indeed had he any letter from his patient which had authorised him to dispose of the file of documents in the first place. So by July 1974, Scott asked a firm of lawyers in Braunton, Montague Arthur and Skerratt, to help him get his property returned.

"All I knew about the mystery purchaser," Scott said, "was that he was a man who had raced down to Devon from the Midlands."

So Neil Skerratt, one of the partners, spoke to Dr Gleadle to try to establish the man's identity. He was told that the doctor's patient had authorised him to have the file destroyed, but Scott became irate at this, denying, categorically that he had ever given any such authorisation.

Gleadle too had instructed his lawyer and the legal wrangle stumbled on into the winter.

In the meantime Scott's lawyers were still attempting to establish the name of the solicitor who had apparently witnessed the destruction of Scott's papers.

On November 7, Gleadle's lawyers replied somewhat plaintively: "We do not see how we can implicate a colleague of the profession." And Scott decided at that point that he would change his lawyer, a habit he had displayed in the past.

Jeremy Ferguson entered the field and continued the slow-motion battle with Ron Gleadle. Ferguson made it clear to Gleadle's advisers, Crosse Wyatt and Company, that if they would not reveal the name of the solicitors concerned, Scott would have no alternative but to sue the doctor.

Scott was granted Legal Aid under the "Green Form" scheme in December, and £75 was made available from public funds, in order that Counsel could be consulted and the case taken – at the expense of the British public and to the inevitable cost of the Liberal, Labour and now Conservative Parties – into open court. But five days before Christmas 1974, Dr Gleadle's lawyers disclosed the information which Scott had so desperately sought. In a short letter to Ferguson, Crosse Wyatt wrote: "Our client does not have the papers and it may be if you were to contact Brewer and Barnes, Solicitors, they would confirm this also."

The name of Brewer and Barnes of Barnstaple had not been mentioned in correspondence before, but it was a clue that Scott thought he could interpret – he knew that Michael Barnes was also Jeremy Thorpe's solicitor.

But if the anonymous benefactor had paid £2,500 just in order to destroy the letters, what were his motives and what was his name? When Jeremy Ferguson wrote to Michael Barnes at the end of December, asking to know the person to whom the file had been passed, he heard nothing. Barnes had decided not to reply, an occurrence which was rare enough to be significant between colleagues of the same profession, and the name of the donor remained a tight secret for the time being.

It was not until more than two years after Scott had received the £2,500, in the immediate aftermath of his outburst in January 1976, that there was the first Press speculation about the identity of the mysterious benefactor. Not surprisingly perhaps in the circumstances, suspicion at first fell on Dr Ronald Gleadle. Others believed that it might turn out to be Peter Bessell. Then from the clippings Courtiour and Penrose saw that a man called David Holmes had claimed that he was the person who had bought Scott's file. The reporters wondered whether he really was the "ultimate benefactor".

The business of the £2,500 also raised a separate question which both reporters found difficult to ignore. It was that while Scott claimed he had not sold his file, or even offered it for sale, he had nevertheless gone on to spend the money which Dr Gleadle had put into the bank accounts in his name. Why had he not refused to accept the money in the first place? Indeed, in view of the fact that his file of papers had disappeared, why did he not turn to the police for help?

When Penrose put these questions to Scott he replied: "In effect I suppose in accepting that £2,500 I was selling a file containing material . . . I really wasn't aware of what I was doing. I was full of these pills and I guess I was drinking heavily and found that I had an enormous number of friends suddenly, and that was that . . . the file was taken from me and £2,500 given to me: I would rather put it that way because I think that really is it."

Afterwards, although his lawyers were eventually to discover that Michael Barnes had apparently played some part in the "purchase" of the file, Scott gradually lost faith during 1974 that the processes of the law would ever return the papers to his possession. The trail for him had clearly gone cold. But he remembered the piece of paper which Dr Gleadle had left behind on the kitchen table on the night he had taken away his file. It was a sheet of official headed paper from the South Molton Health Centre and it bore a note which said cryptically:

- G.W. – return photostats
- return tapes
- writ against publication
- *People* – no wish writ.

Penrose asked Scott what this note meant. Did he understand what Dr Gleadle was saying in it?

Scott reminded the reporter of the circumstances of Dr Gleadle's visit just forty-eight hours before the February Election, when he had been dazed by his pills.

According to Scott it was not the first time that Dr Gleadle had taken away his papers. In the past he had occasionally looked after them for him.

"Anyway," said Scott, "during the night I went into the kitchen and I saw that Dr Gleadle had left this note on Health Centre notepaper. G.W. was Gordon Winter; the tapes were the tape-recordings I had made with Winter in 1971. And the "writ against publication" was presumably a reference to the article Winter had wanted to write about my case for the *People* newspaper. An article which I only learned he wanted to do for the *People* afterwards."

Scott told Penrose that the very next day he had visited Dr Gleadle and returned his note to him, although before he had done so he had photocopied it. "I told him that I didn't know if it was right. And he said: 'It really will be financially. You'll be able to sort things out.' I said: 'You've left this note on the kitchen table and I don't understand it. And really I don't agree with it.' But he kept my file and still went ahead with what he was doing which I didn't really know about. But I'd given him his note back before he put that money in the bank."

According to Scott's account Dr Gleadle had talked vaguely about more money being paid to him in future years. The £2,500 was only the first payment. Scott none the less said he was worried and asked the doctor to return his papers immediately.

"Dr Gleadle said: 'No way, baby,'" he continued. "I'll never forget those words. It was very un-him, this kind of hip talk. My file had gone, but he wouldn't say where. I remember the bank manager, Mr Coomber, saying that the cheque had been drawn on a Manchester bank account, but everybody seemed very cagey about it all."

For Scott the sudden recollection that Gordon Winter – G.W. – in South Africa probably still had a copy of his file instantly raised his hopes. He remembered how Winter had carefully photocopied each document and perhaps he had kept those copies. So he decided he would try to contact Winter in Johannesburg and get them back. In the meantime he told Dr Gleadle that he would pay the £2,500 back because a wealthy friend in London would lend

him the money. According to Scott, the doctor merely said it was too late. The file was no longer in his possession.

When David Holmes from Manchester eventually declared that he was the person who had paid the money for the Scott file, Norman Scott was still not convinced that he was the real buyer. So Courtiour and Penrose considered the other possibilities. By all accounts Peter Bessell was tall, slim and middle-aged: exactly the description that Dr Gleadle had given of the man he claimed to have met briefly when he had accepted the cheque. So could he turn out to be the man – the person Courtiour privately dubbed the "ultimate benefactor" – rather than David Holmes?

In terms of his past involvement, Bessell had several possible motives for wanting the file destroyed.

On the telephone from London, Courtiour asked Bessell if he knew anything about the payment of £2,500. But he said he did not. The first he had learned of the incident was nearly two years after the event from an old friend of his called David Holmes.

There was no doubt in Peter Bessell's mind that Holmes had purchased the file. "Damn it, David told me he had bought it, in January 1976," he said on the telephone. "Frankly I couldn't understand why he had paid such a vast sum of money for a collection of papers which I considered worthless. The contents of the letters were not damaging to me and whichever way one looked at the payments Holmes had made it could be interpreted as hush money."

Bessell made it plain on the telephone that he had been a friend of David Holmes for many years and that he personally liked the man. According to Bessell's thumbnail sketch, Holmes was a quietly spoken sophisticated man with a lively eclectic mind.

But while Liberal supporters had long been aware of the ebullient Jeremy Thorpe, even before he became an MP, few Party workers seemed to have taken much notice of his friend David Holmes, the shy merchant banker from Manchester. In fact, Philip Watkins, a stalwart Liberal for many years and Thorpe's successor as National Party Treasurer in 1967, was surprised to learn years later that Holmes had ever been the Party's Deputy Treasurer. The bespectacled accountant told the reporters in Llandudno that other Party workers had also been surprised to learn of the appointment which Thorpe had apparently created years before.

The reporters decided to speak directly to Holmes. But he was not to prove the easiest person to meet. Penrose called the



45-year-old banker in June 1976, asking if a meeting could be arranged. He at first agreed, saying it could perhaps take place when he was next in London.

Penrose took the opportunity to ask him if he could confirm that he had bought the so-called Scott file for £2,500, as Peter Bessell had suggested. The banker said he had. "But," he added in a low whisper, "I'm no longer connected with the Liberal Party."

Penrose continued to put in calls to him in the weeks that followed, pressing him for the promised meeting.

In December Penrose and Courtiour decided they would drive to Manchester and call on Holmes at home. There was thick snow on the ground when they arrived. A tall slim man answered the door bell.

"David is away until tomorrow I'm afraid," he said, adding later that his name was Gerald Hagan. Penrose was disappointed but said that he and his colleague would stay overnight in Manchester and await Holmes's return.

As they drove off the reporters felt pessimistic. They had made the three-hour car journey from London and it now looked as if they had come for nothing. But rather to their surprise a lawyer called them next morning at their hotel, saying that he represented David Holmes and worked for a firm of solicitors called D. J. Freeman & Co. Penrose instantly recognised the name: Sir Harold Wilson had once mentioned that David Freeman was representing him in a libel suit he had begun against the *Sunday Express*. It was a striking coincidence that out of thousands of solicitors Holmes should use the same London firm as the former Premier. The lawyer said he would prefer it if they dealt with him rather than direct with Mr Holmes. He thought that a meeting with his client might be arranged in a matter of days.

Penrose and Courtiour returned to London and on 15 December they went along to the offices of D. J. Freeman where Freeman introduced his client David Holmes and then a second lawyer.

David Holmes looked a fastidious man, his whole appearance impeccable. In every way he matched Peter Bessell's description of him on the telephone and really did look like a young and prosperous merchant banker.

There were several points the reporters wanted to check, but gradually they turned the conversation round to the purchase of Scott's letters just before the Election of February 1974. Once

more David Holmes confirmed the part that he had played in the incident. He began by stressing that he had done it for the sake of the Liberal Party and that his friend Jeremy Thorpe had known nothing of the transaction whatsoever.

"I bought the letters for £2,500. That is now a matter of public record."

But Penrose asked what he had done with them once Dr Gleadle had handed him the papers.

"I then destroyed them," he answered. "In an Aga at Barnes's place."

The reporters were puzzled about his motives for such an odd venture. Why had he bought the letters only to destroy them so immediately?

"The Scott letters appeared to me to indicate some kind of blackmail," he replied, without elaborating on who was blackmailing whom.

"David felt it could besmirch the Liberal Party if they became public," interrupted David Freeman helpfully.

"Peter Bessell's old constituency at Bodmin had a slim majority," Holmes went on. "I believed that if the letters were published they could have affected the vote. You see all the letters, some typed and some handwritten, were from Mr Bessell."

The lawyer broke into the conversation again. "I think in retrospect that the purchase of the letters was one of the silliest things David has ever done, if he doesn't mind my saying so." David Freeman looked across at his client with a faint air of disapproval.

"I would say on that occasion in February 74, I was supporting the Liberal Party," Holmes said finally. "It was three days before an election in which we might have come back into power. And we put a lot of effort and money into that election."

On this point David Holmes was right. The opinion polls at that time had shown that the Liberals might do exceptionally well, and over the country as a whole they did in fact treble their previous vote.

But Peter Bessell had already denied that the letters were damaging to him, so Penrose asked if Holmes had really bought the file on behalf of the Liberal leader. David Freeman interrupted his client once more: "If he was acting for Thorpe, Thorpe himself already had copies of those letters. Why should Thorpe pay £2,500 for them?" Courtiour felt however, that this was an illogical

argument, since his client had talked about destroying the letters, not about needing to possess them.

Holmes asserted once more that Thorpe and the Liberal Party had no knowledge of the affair. "I bought them because they seemed to prove to me that, without using any emotive words like blackmail, they showed Bessell had paid out regular sums of money to Scott."

Penrose posed another question: "Did the police ever question you about the money you had paid for the Scott letters?"

"The police did not question me," said Holmes, annoyance showing through in his voice. "I went to the Director of Public Prosecutions of my own accord." He had talked to the police about the matter quite voluntarily.

"I am rather cross I wasted all that money since I did not know the letters had already been seen by Mr Thorpe and the Press," he said with apparent exasperation. "Had I known that others knew of them I would never have paid the money."

According to newspaper reports at the time, Holmes had issued a statement through his London solicitors on 5 March 1976 confirming that he had purchased the Scott file.

"I can confirm," Thorpe was reported as saying, "that I never consented to or had any knowledge of this transaction. I am, however, relieved that this matter has now been cleared up.

"I understood that the letters in question referred to the Bessell-Scott correspondence. These letters are very, very old hat. My colleagues and I saw them in 1971. At that time photocopies were taken. I retained a set."

So the Liberal leader himself had confirmed what David Holmes continued to assert: that he knew nothing about the original purchase. And the politician clearly intended to make light of the whole affair as a well-intentioned mistake on Holmes's part. For the *Sunday Times* too, who defended Thorpe stoutly on 14 March 1976, the story of the £2,500 file was only a marginal element in the Liberal Party saga: "Just extra drops of bat's blood in the cauldron."

Bat's blood or whatever, there seemed little doubt to Penrose and Courtiour that someone had considered the letters worth such a large sum of money simply to destroy them. And what about Scott's belief that the £2,500 was to be only the first of several payments to be made in his favour? Once Dr Gleadle had handed Scott's file over to be destroyed, the only private individual to

possess the papers had been Gordon Winter, the South African journalist with the unusual right-wing Secret Service contacts. Had he been then left in an unrivalled position outside British official and Liberal Party circles to control the possibilities of future publication of the letters?

And had the 1974 General Election been about to raise the British Liberal Party into a new position of greater influence on national and international affairs – a position that would make them, and the other politicians who knew about their secrets, even more vulnerable to outside political interference?

## Chapter 21

After following the trail of the £2,500 incident as far as possible, to the point where Jeremy Thorpe and his former Deputy Treasurer had taken pains to dismiss it as a foolish and wasteful exercise, Penrose and Courtiour turned their attention to yet another of Norman Scott's fantastic tales. Perhaps this would show the deal not to have been quite so foolish.

At the beginning of 1974 Scott was living, in his own way, quite a settled life and Dr Gleadle's idea of providing him with peace of mind and his own stables might have seemed quite reasonable at the time. The reporters had seen photographs of him on horseback and they showed a tall, stylish young man impeccably turned out in a well-cut tweed hacking jacket, knee-breeches, black polished riding boots and a curly-brimmed bowler hat. Even during this period when he was being given massive doses of tranquillisers he was still capable of getting through a surprising amount of work with his beloved horses, and this was appreciated by people in the area who knew something about horsemanship. Over the years, local owners had taken advantage of his skills and invited him to ride and school their horses, and now they continued to do so.

Scott was actually responsible for looking after two horses while he was living at Thorn Mead in the winter of 1973/4. There was a spirited point-to-pointer and an 8-year-old dark bay gelding called Late Deal belonging to a neighbour's stepdaughter Sally Richards.

At times Scott also went out hunting with the Exmoor Foxhounds. His horses were always well-groomed and he knew how to conduct himself with others in the foxhunting fraternity. He also rode exceptionally well.

If nothing had happened to disturb this situation, it might well have gone on for a good deal longer, because despite his shattered nerves the reporters could not help feeling that Scott had come fairly close to achieving what was the ideal life for him: horses and dogs to look after, a home in a beautiful part of the country, and a degree of acceptance in a society to whom appearances were of the first importance. But it was not in Scott's nature to remain on a

steady course for any length of time, and the next collision was on its way.

On 12 January 1974, not long before the date of the General Election was announced by the Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath, Scott said he had experienced a weird and frightening event at his isolated home on Exmoor: a helicopter had landed near his bungalow and two men had prowled around the remote spot and banged on his door. Terrified of being attacked, he said he had cowered behind the door where he could not be seen from the window. Then, he said, the men had jumped back into the helicopter and disappeared into the mist across the moors.

"It could have been just hallucinations," said Penrose, as the two reporters discussed the possible explanations for this happening. "We know he was on prescriptions of drugs at the time: so couldn't he have imagined the whole thing?"

But the two reporters found evidence to show that Scott was seriously frightened at the time. He was convinced that the two men had come to kill him. He had come running down the winding lane to the neighbouring farmhouse where his landlord Graham Leeves and his wife lived, literally crying with fear. Hazel Leeves had been at home and Scott had been hysterical and incoherent when he burst in on her.

It was finding proof of whether the helicopter had really existed which was the main problem. Mr Leeves himself had been hedging a few fields away from where Scott was living, but he said he had seen and heard nothing.

Newspaper reporters too had gone searching for witnesses when they heard about the story nearly two years later but none of them had come up with anything definite. The furthest that Courtiour and Penrose could get was that riders who were with the Exmoor Foxhounds that day thought that they had seen the helicopter.

Penrose was still unhappy with this small amount of information, so he decided to have another word with the farmer's wife Hazel Leeves. He had already talked to her on the telephone in May and she had not mentioned actually seeing the helicopter.

When he called her a second time, he asked her if, like her husband Graham, she was absolutely certain she had not seen it. There were a few seconds of silence on the line. Then, slowly, she replied:

"I never said I didn't see a helicopter on the day Norman Scott rushed down here. It was a helicopter used by a neighbour, I think,

who once lived nearby. A private one with red and white markings."

But who could have been paying Scott this flying visit? The reporters tried various possibilities but to no avail. They asked the RAF, the Army and the Electricity Board, all of whom fly helicopters. But apparently no machine of theirs had ever landed there. They also contacted a property dealer called David Hart, who frequently flew from London to his country home near Simonsbath, not far from Scott's place at Exford. He too said he had never landed off course there by mistake. The only explanation he could offer was that there were many wealthy people in the area who flew about in helicopters: so it could have been anybody.

At least it could now be said that the helicopter was certainly not just a figment of Scott's imagination, though Penrose and Courtiour could only guess at why it had happened to land outside Scott's house. Perhaps it was just a mistake or a coincidence, something with a quite innocent explanation. Or perhaps Scott's fears had been justified and somebody was out to kill him or abduct him.

The important thing was the effect that the fright itself had had on Scott and what he had done as a result of it.

In the early 1960s when he was doing the odd bit of canvassing in the North Devon area and had also been out foxhunting on Exmoor, Scott claimed he had had a nodding acquaintance with Timothy Keigwin, the local farmer who had stood against Thorpe as the Conservative candidate. Keigwin had been selected to stand again at the forthcoming election as the Conservatives' choice for North Devon, so he was the Liberal leader's keenest political opponent.

"On the day the helicopter landed," said Scott, "I spoke to Mr Keigwin that evening and told him what had been happening. I was really frightened at that point."

In great agitation Scott had described to Keigwin the incident which had occurred only hours before. He felt his life was at risk. He wanted to meet the politician urgently.

Courtior too found Tim Keigwin an easy person to approach. He asked him if he remembered receiving the telephone call from Norman Scott.

"Yes," said Keigwin, "I had barely heard of Scott and he rang me out of the blue. I recall Mr Scott saying to me: 'It is about the

Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe.' I interrupted the man at once and said to him: 'You realise that anything on a personal basis I cannot possibly use.' But Scott said I had missed the point. He really wanted me to hear his whole story which I later did."

As the prospective Conservative candidate for North Devon and the Liberal leader's direct political adversary, Keigwin suddenly found himself in a tricky spot. Here was a constituent, a potential voter, turning to the local Conservative Party for help and at the same time making highly damaging allegations against the Liberal MP who had successfully kept Keigwin out of Parliament for years. In the June 1970 election, Thorpe had defeated the Conservative candidate by a frustratingly small margin. If the farmer failed to act immediately he laid himself open to criticism and yet if he took hasty action the result might be misinterpreted locally and prove politically embarrassing to his Party.

In fact, a month or so before the helicopter incident, while Keigwin and his party agent Robin Nelder were out canvassing, they had been put in touch with Mr Pennington who had told them in graphic detail what he had heard from Norman Scott.

"Once we had been told the story," said Nelder, "I thought it sufficiently important to go home and talk into my tape recorder. But of course it was only hearsay. My tape was passed to Conservative Central Office in London and played to people there. I imagine it's the political intelligence the Party gets all the time on all kinds of subjects."

When he heard directly from Scott, Keigwin therefore turned at once to his constituency Chairman for advice.

On 13 January 1974, less than twenty-four hours after the supposed helicopter landing, Tim Keigwin accompanied by an independent witness, a solicitor called John Palmer, visited Scott's bungalow. The two men were soon to hear the whole of Scott's basic story. Before leaving the bungalow they were also handed a manuscript which Scott had written out in longhand.

This manuscript, which Scott helpfully passed to Thorpe's main political rival, covered several sheets of paper and contained an account of his alleged involvement with the Liberal leader. Penrose and Courtior were to see it too and agreed with Tim Keigwin that, coupled with the Bessell "retainer" letters, the manuscript did have a disturbing ring about it. Scott had packed his story with the closest detail of his claims.

Not only did Scott hand over his manuscript but he also showed

Keigwin and Palmer the file of papers which shortly afterwards was to be removed by Dr Gleadle. In it were letters revealing that certain of Scott's difficulties had even come to the notice of prominent Labour politicians in the previous Wilson Government.

"John Palmer and I listened to his story which turned out to be very long," said Keigwin. "What we saw then and heard took a bit of taking in all at one go."

Keigwin and Palmer took a copy of Scott's manuscript to Conservative constituency headquarters in Barnstaple. After lengthy discussions it was decided that John Palmer would personally carry the Scott manuscript and his own notes of the extraordinary meeting to Conservative Central Office at Smith Square in London so that the contents of the material could be assimilated and assessed by the Party's policymakers.

"The assumption was that Central Office would investigate the whole story pretty closely," said Keigwin.

The manuscript was, after all, being sent to the Tories' Central Office at a time when there was widespread speculation about an imminent General Election.

At the end of October Sir Michael Fraser, the Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, had sent a memorandum to the Tory Premier suggesting several possible dates for going to the polls and he had included the spring of 1974 as his earliest choice. He had also suggested that whatever Mr Heath decided on should be kept a carefully guarded secret so that they would have the element of surprise which is the traditional advantage of the party in power.

By this period Edward Heath had been Prime Minister for just over three years and he and his Government had the right to remain in office for at least another eighteen months. But the United Kingdom was in a virtually unprecedented state of internal conflict and near-economic collapse, with the world oil crisis and the miners' strike in the winter of 1973/4.

Heath's Government had countered this situation first by declaring a national State of Emergency on 13 November, and then on 13 December announcing that it intended to introduce a three-day week in the new year. Factories, workshops and offices would function for only half the working week in an effort to save power.

Some constituents in North Devon, as elsewhere in Britain, placed much of the blame for the nation's troubles on the growing strength of the trades unions. They had read in their newspapers that the National Union of Miners was dominated by Communists

and fellow travellers. But political leaders on the left were just as adamant that right-wing financial interests were encouraging the rejection of the workers' reasonable demands and thereby weakening the country. Class warfare, not an entirely new factor in British society, suddenly broke out into the open and recalled much of the old bitterness that had led to the General Strike in 1926.

In these particular circumstances, any election which took place was bound to be a do-or-die affair and behind the scenes at Conservative Party headquarters every single factor which could have a bearing on the timing and the outcome was being weighed by Heath's astute and experienced advisers. When John Palmer went to London in the third week of January 1974 he could not have chosen a more crucial time to visit Central Office. He had earlier made an appointment to see two of the most powerful members of the Tory Party: Sir Michael Fraser (now Lord Fraser), the Deputy Chairman of the Party, and Sir Richard Webster, the Director of Organisation. Both men were heavily involved in preparing the Party machine in case the Prime Minister Edward Heath decided to lower the starting flag for an early spring campaign. Neither of them would welcome the news that one of the chief contenders alongside them on the starting grid had a six-inch nail in his tyre and was liable to career all over the road. Such maverick factors were difficult to bring into their political calculations about the impending election.

The Tiverton solicitor was shown into an office and introduced to Fraser and Webster. A third man, a special assistant, was also present and making notes. Palmer summarised what he knew of Scott's story and handed over a copy of the Scott manuscript. The men glanced down at it and agreed rather formally that they would read it more carefully later. Once they had discussed it fully they would decide on what action to take.

The North Devon constituency had presented Central Office with the knottiest of problems. Sir Richard Webster had formed the impression that Tim Keigwin wanted to drag the Thorpe story into his local election campaign.

"I didn't think it a frightfully good idea to use it in any election," Sir Richard told Penrose.

He remembered giving Tim Keigwin this opinion about the matter. "My advice," he said, "was that he would be unwise to use it. But he didn't say 'I won't mention it during the election campaign.'"

Sir Richard had arranged for the manuscript to be kept in an office safe, away from prying eyes. For one thing there must be no Press leaks. And concerned as he was with the Party's national strategy, the last thing Sir Richard wanted was for a Party worker at Central Office to get the same idea that this material was for use in local electioneering.

But what did he and his colleagues at Central Office actually make of the manuscript?

"They may sound detailed," replied Webster, "but they may be a figment of a very vivid imagination."

Whatever their reservations about the allegations, he and Sir Michael Fraser decided to take the matter to the Party Chairman, Lord Carrington. They thought he should be the one to decide what to make of the whole business. Penrose spoke to Lord Fraser, too, and he said he remembered the incident well.

"We certainly met together," he said. "It would be for us to pass on such information."

As far as Sir Richard and Sir Michael were concerned their formal responsibility ended the moment they handed Lord Carrington the manuscript and reported to him what they had heard from North Devon.

"I don't know what happened to the information after we handed it on," Sir Richard said now three years later, on the telephone. "What Lord Carrington did about it was his responsibility."

Penrose asked if he had mentioned the subject to anybody else inside Central Office.

"No," he replied at once. "One wouldn't mention it to anybody else; it's not the sort of thing one does talk about, is it?"

Lord Carrington told Penrose that he vividly remembered how Sir Richard Webster and Sir Michael Fraser had come to him with the material:

"I thought it was in my province as Chairman of the Party to decide what should be used and what should not," Lord Carrington explained. "I didn't want tittle-tattle of that kind used in party politics just before an election. I didn't want any part of it.

"I said: 'How perfectly horrible. Don't touch it with the end of a barge pole. Take it away. I don't want to read it.'"

The reporter asked if he had read the whole manuscript. "Good God no," replied Lord Carrington. "The last thing the Party would do is to use a thing like that."

Sir Richard Webster's account of the meeting that he and Michael Fraser had had with Lord Carrington differed only slightly from the version provided by the Party Chairman. When the reporter later told Sir Richard that Lord Carrington said he had not read it because it was too "horrible", he replied: "I don't remember his saying it was too horrible, I don't want to read it. He must have read some of it to think it was too horrible."

Whether Lord Carrington had actually read the script or not, Penrose and Courtiour felt it must certainly be an indication of how seriously such high-ranking advisers took this information that they should draw his attention to it at this particular time. The urgent issue which faced the Conservative Government and was crippling the whole of Britain's economy at that time, was the rapid decline in the country's energy supplies.

In a Cabinet reshuffle on 8 January, Mr Heath had moved Lord Carrington from the Ministry of Defence to a newly created Department of Energy; so he had now become the Government's key man with a vital responsibility for the most threatened area of the economy. The reporters imagined that a Cabinet Minister in these hard-pressed circumstances would scarcely expect his experienced advisers to trouble him with a matter which was only of local constituency importance; something that could be dismissed as merely "tittle-tattle".

The reporters felt, too, that it was unlikely that Lord Carrington would in turn have gone on to discuss with the Prime Minister a document which he had said he did not want to read or a subject that he did not wish the Party to touch with a barge pole. All the same, just to settle this point, Penrose decided to ask him if he had mentioned the subject to Mr Heath.

"I simply don't remember, to be truthful," he replied. "I don't remember: perhaps I did, perhaps I didn't."

Both Penrose and Courtiour, however, thought it important that they ask Edward Heath for his own recollections of events just before the February election of 1974.

Luckily they heard he was holding a "surgery" in his constituency on the evening of the very same day that Penrose talked to Lord Carrington. This was an occasion on which the Member of Parliament made himself available for an hour or two for any of his constituents to come along and discuss their individual problems with him.

Inside the Conservative headquarters at Sidcup, then covered in

Union Jacks and bunting for the 1977 Jubilee celebrations, an elderly Party worker asked what they wished to speak with Mr Heath about. The reporters were momentarily lost for words.

"Well, let me tell you that the last two constituents talked about vandalism and education," the official said helpfully.

Penrose thought to himself that the subject they really wanted to raise could not easily be paraphrased. So he said that the matter they had come about was loosely connected with the Common Market. He had in mind that Tim Keigwin was fiercely against the Common Market and the former Premier was one of its most eloquent advocates.

The Conservative ex-Prime Minister, like the other ex-Prime Minister they were accustomed to meeting, had the *savoir-faire* of an eminent statesman and appeared to the two somewhat guilty reporters to look at them rather imperiously. They quickly sketched in the background to their visit and Penrose mentioned that he had already spoken to others with knowledge of the Scott manuscript and its arrival at Central Office before the February 1974 election. The reporter told him that Lord Carrington could not remember if he had brought it to his attention. Did Mr Heath know anything about it?

"I remember precisely and exactly what happened," he said. "When the election campaign began, he told me that allegations were being made against Mr Thorpe in North Devon and that he had instructed the candidate in no circumstances were they to be used by any Conservative in an election campaign. And I said he was absolutely right to do so. And this was the general rule for the whole Party throughout the country. That was the end of it. Two sentences."

Mr Heath went on to say that Lord Carrington had not mentioned to him who had brought the information to Central Office. He certainly had not read the manuscript which had apparently been left with Sir Michael Fraser and Sir Richard Webster.

On the pre-Election attitude of the Conservatives to the information that had been gathered in North Devon, that was all that Mr Heath had to say. The trail of the "fantastic" helicopter incident had, however, led all the way up to the Prime Minister, making this the second time, to Penrose and Courtiour's knowledge, that the Scott affair had undeniably been drawn to the attention of the head of Her Majesty's Government. But yet again

there was the suggestion that the affair was best ignored, and certainly not spoken about in public by gentlemen and politicians.

The reporters continued their interview with Edward Heath and put to him a number of further questions on national security which he answered. There were other questions, however, to which he refused point blank to reply.

Finally, before leaving Edward Heath, the reporters asked him if he knew Norman Scott's mother, Mrs Josiffe. She was a former Tory candidate in council elections in the area and had been a Party worker at Mr Heath's own constituency headquarters. The reporters wondered if because of this he might have been aware of the Thorpe-Scott story much earlier than 1974. But the ex-Prime Minister said he could not remember Mrs Josiffe.

"Oh I do," said a Party worker who had entered the room seconds before. "Once stood for the GLC elections four years ago."

After this meeting, Courtiour and Penrose began discussing some of the implications of their recent enquiries. It did seem extraordinary that once more the Scott story had been pushed into the political arena at a particularly important moment: the lead-up to a General Election. And that this time it had involved the Conservative Party. In the past Scott had tended to present the Labour and Liberal Parties with a dilemma.

But it would be wrong to assume that his allegations had never troubled the moral and political consciences of Conservative ministers. After all, the Conservatives had been in office in 1962 at the time when the matter was first officially drawn to the attention of the police. The Home Secretary at that time with responsibility for the police was Henry Brooke. Similarly, it had been a Conservative Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, who had dealt with the outcome of the secret Liberal Party enquiry in 1971.

It was remarkable, too, how concerned all the political figures at Westminster were that the affair should be treated as a private matter and to suggest that only gentlemanly rules of conduct were ever applied to dealing with such things.

On 13 January 1974, the day on which Tim Keigwin and John Palmer were visiting Norman Scott to hear his story, the Conservative Party's Steering Committee had met with the Prime Minister at Chequers to discuss a possible date for the General Election. No date had been settled on that occasion but by the evening of Wednesday 5 February – three weeks later – the Prime

Minister had actually telegraphed the Queen who was on a visit to Australia, advising her that he was now ready to go to the polls with the absolute minimum of delay. Some time between those two dates, and probably during the fortnight between John Palmer's visit to Central Office and the actual announcement of the election, a decision had been reached. Whether the one event had any bearing on the other was, the reporters felt, a matter for debate, but certainly the developments at Westminster and in North Devon had followed each other thick and fast during those few days, including all the arrangements concerning the purchase of Scott's potentially embarrassing papers for £2,500.

But why, at this extreme juncture, would the Conservatives be particularly concerned with acting in a gentlemanly fashion towards the leader of the Liberal Party? In the first place, there was everything to suggest that in his personal conduct Edward Heath was a man of honour. And, more cynically, it had been pointed out to the reporters that as a steadfastly unmarried man of middle age, Mr Heath himself had suffered from quite unjustified speculation and innuendo about his private life. So he was not the man to indulge in anything that had the appearance of slinging mud at others. But apart from this straightforward personalised explanation, what would the motivation be in terms of political expediency, bearing in mind that a disclosure of their information by the Conservatives might have been morally as well as politically justified?

It would not have been the first time that "slandorous" material had been used to effect in a British election campaign. The reporters were reminded of a notorious affair during the 1924 General Election when the Labour Party was defeated and the Conservatives returned to power partly, some historians believed, because of the publication of the so-called Zinoviev Letter in the *Daily Mail* just before polling day. Supposedly written by Gregory Zinoviev, President of the International, to a prominent British communist called McManus, the letter had urged Party workers to ferment a revolutionary insurrection in Britain. And on that occasion it had been the Conservative Party Headquarters that had leaked the damaging document to the Press, despite the fact that it turned out to be a slanderous forgery. In time, moreover, it was shown that the British Secret Service had become involved. They had ensured that the forgery came into right-wing hands.

Fifty years later, in the peculiar circumstances which pertained

during the three-day week in 1974, the election, somewhat irrationally, began to look like a choice between died-in-the-wool capitalists – Conservative – and destructive near-Communists – Labour; and the Liberals, led by Jeremy Thorpe, had benefited from this distortion of images by seeming to represent the middle way.

In fact, in the period before Heath announced the 28 February election Thorpe had made efforts to settle the miners' strike himself. In the course of his endeavours the Liberal leader had even visited the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers. Although nothing came of his visits and his optimism, in the eyes of many voters it seemed to make him the most reasonable of the three Party leaders.

The idea that Thorpe and his Party could possibly do well, perhaps even win, might have seemed absurd eighteen months before. But his star was rising fast in the first days of the campaign and the forecasts, confirmed by several public opinion polls, looked bright. One poll showed that 40% of the electorate would vote Liberal if the party had a chance of holding the balance between the two major Parties. And the same poll suggested that 48% would vote Liberal if the Party had a real chance of forming the next government.

The thorn in the argument, especially for the "floating" voter, was that by casting a Liberal vote they could inadvertently be letting in the Party they did not want, be that Tory or Labour. But against these traditional fears Jeremy Thorpe fought valiantly with greater resources than he had ever enjoyed before.

On 25 February, just three days before voters made their decision at the polls, Thorpe declared confidently: "I want to make it clear once again that the Liberal Party is in this election, first and foremost, to form a government. If this is not to be . . . I repeat my willingness to work with any person of moderate and progressive views to get this country back on the rails."

Political commentators were now saying that Jeremy Thorpe and the Liberal vote were fast becoming the single most important factor in the election.

Millions now saw in him the qualities which might bring the conflicting interests of labour and capital together in a manner in which others had patently failed in the past.

It was at this point that the shrewdness of any decision by the Conservative Party not to attack Jeremy Thorpe, or use the



information which they possessed to damage him, during the election campaign became clear. If the election did turn out to be a close-run event, as the opinion polls were predicting, there might easily be a deadlocked Parliament, in which case the Liberal Party would hold the balance of power. Although, realistically speaking, Thorpe was expecting too much when he talked about running a Liberal government of his own, a coalition with either Labour or the Conservatives was looking more and more likely, and Heath, whether he cared to acknowledge it as such or not, was holding a wild card in the form of Norman Scott's manuscript.

Throughout the campaign Jeremy Thorpe decided to remain firmly in his North Devon constituency. Unlike Edward Heath and Harold Wilson, he did not tour the whole country in well-publicised walk-about. Instead, he made a personal decision to stay close to his own base, making only lightning visits to the remoter parts of his constituency and travelling on these occasions, as he had in the past, in a helicopter. He even had a TV link set up between London and his Liberal Party headquarters in Barnstaple. This enabled him to attend a daily "Press conference", during which he would sit in Devon and could be seen by reporters two hundred miles away in the capital city.

The outcome of the election depended on 635 individual fights between candidates in constituencies around Britain. But many of the electorate made up their minds on how to vote from the personalities the Parties' image-makers were able to project. The Liberal leader was younger than his rivals; more youthful in his appearance. On 25 February he was photographed vaulting over a fence.

But many of his Party supporters could not understand why he would not venture outside North Devon. Why was there no real national campaign spearheaded by the Party's leader? It did seem odd that he refused to tour Liberal strongholds and areas where the Liberals had a real chance of winning. A few people were well aware that in 1970 Jeremy Thorpe had only scraped home with a 369-vote majority over his Tory opponent Tim Keigwin. But the polls were showing he enjoyed enormous local popularity now and could expect a landslide victory in North Devon. The invitations and growing mystification from Liberal quarters elsewhere were to remain unanswered throughout the whole campaign. Thorpe had his reasons, and they were to remain firmly private for the time being.

Unknown to all these loyal but puzzled fellow Liberals, inside the North Devon constituency itself there were submerged dangers which threatened to shipwreck Thorpe at any time. The politician feared them so keenly that he even asked his solicitor, Michael Barnes, to keep a special watch on Keigwin's campaign meetings.

"It really was rather amusing to see Mr Barnes sitting at the front of one of my meetings," recalled the Conservative candidate. "I remember he would sit down and raise his hat to me, a pencil and notebook in his hand."

In the weeks of campaigning Tim Keigwin did not breathe a word of what he knew. He concentrated on the national issues as most candidates were to do in the country as a whole. Rarely had British politics appeared so polarised, so sharply divided between the opinions of Left and Right. For Geoffrey Rippon, the sitting Tory member for Hexham, the electoral choice was frightening yet simple. In his Press advertisements he proclaimed the party message: "We are in the throes of a war we dare not lose. For your country's sake vote Conservative."

Another Tory candidate in Mansfield saw it in similar terms: "The alternative is chaos and anarchy and ultimately Communist dictatorship."

To Keigwin, who found himself being treated almost as a hot-head, it must have been a frustrating time. Not only was he being kept an eye on by his opponent's lawyer, which he was inclined to regard as rather funny, but the Liberal leader was clearly picking up votes by seeming to tend his constituency so assiduously. As Edward Heath had confirmed to the reporters, Lord Carrington had asked for an undertaking from Keigwin that he would not mention the Scott material in his campaign. And then Michael Barnes actually turned up at Conservative headquarters in Barnstaple. The Tory agent, Robin Nelder, showed Barnes into a room where Tim Keigwin was putting the final touches to his campaign plans.

"I really did get a warning from Thorpe's solicitor on our doorstep," explained the former Tory candidate. "Barnes said to me: 'I am under orders to issue a writ if you make any mention of Norman Scott during the next three weeks.'"

And Barnes was reported in the *Times* on 5 February 1976 as saying: "It is correct that I have called on Mr Keigwin, and his account is substantially correct."

Keigwin wondered if his own party had tipped off the Liberal

leader about the story which had come into its possession. How else could it be explained that Thorpe had known of his awareness of the Scott story? Tim Keigwin might not have realised, of course, that Norman Scott's doctor, Ronald Gleadle, had been in touch with Michael Barnes and that Dr Gleadle probably knew from Scott about the helicopter incident and how this had panicked him into contacting the Conservative candidate. In fact, Keigwin also never knew that if he had ever gone back for Scott's file of letters they would not have been there: the £2,500 payment via Dr Gleadle had made sure of that.

By polling day, Keigwin knew at least that he was a defeated man. When the result was announced in the North Devon constituency the Liberal leader had scored a popular personal triumph and increased his majority over the Conservative candidate from 369 to a staggering 11,072.

When Tim Keigwin heard the result given out he was bitterly disappointed. Standing alongside a smiling Jeremy Thorpe he felt his hands had been tied throughout the campaign by his own Party and the threat of writs from his opponent. In fact, Thorpe had actually threatened to issue another writ against him for a public remark referring to his involvement with the ill-fated London and County bank.

Amid crowds of cheering supporters the Liberal leader thanked all his helpers for their loyalty and hard work. Millions of people around the country watched the moment "live" on television, and some of them were startled when it was time for the beaten Conservative candidate to say a few words. Looking straight at Thorpe in the full glare of the television lights, Keigwin told his opponent: "The truth will out and our time will come again!"

"I imagined Mr Thorpe might think I would shout out something about the Norman Scott affair," said Tim Keigwin. "After all, I was standing there on live television. I remember staring hard at him. His face looked darkly apprehensive."

But the exhilaration and suspense of the hour diverted attention from what the Tory candidate was really thinking and the spotlight soon swung to 10 Downing Street. On Friday 1 March, Heath still had no clear majority: the Queen flew back to London from Australia without knowing who her next Prime Minister would be and the electorate waited anxiously to see which Party, or Parties, would form the new government. The outgoing Prime Minister later summed up the situation that he and his Party faced that

particular weekend: "No Party," he said, "was in a position automatically to form a government. Therefore my responsibility, as Prime Minister at the time, was to see whether I could form an administration with a majority."

The main factor that had prevented Heath or Wilson from being returned with a clear-cut majority was the outstanding electoral success of Thorpe and his Party. In the country as a whole the Liberals had trebled their previous vote to more than six million, which was their greatest achievement at the polls since 1929 when they were led by Lloyd George. Britain effectively no longer had a two-party system; in future people at home and overseas would be obliged to take the Liberals into serious account.

It was the first time for forty-three years that the British electoral system had failed to give one Party a clear mandate, and in this situation Edward Heath needed an arrangement with the Liberals to enable the Conservatives to remain in power.

Harold Wilson on the Labour side had already declared publicly that his Party was not prepared to enter into a formal coalition with the Liberals, but neither Edward Heath nor Jeremy Thorpe was opposed to a Tory-Liberal coalition in principle. From North Devon where he was still enjoying the post-Election celebrations Jeremy Thorpe was reported as saying invitingly: "Mr Heath is constitutionally entitled to seek to carry his administration and to see if he can get enough support to do so."

Mr Thorpe then dashed to London because Edward Heath wished to talk with him at 10 Downing Street. A statement from Number 10 afterwards said simply:

"The Prime Minister and Mr Thorpe exchanged views about the current situation and the urgent need in that situation for an administration which can carry on the business of government. They agreed to treat their discussions as entirely confidential."

But in fact for two hours the Conservatives and Liberal leaders had been discussing the terms for a coalition.

As he walked away from Number 10, Mr Thorpe, his face rather drawn but an ambitious confidence showing through his expression, told newsmen: "Quite clearly it is in the interest of the country that some government should be formed. Whether one will be formed I don't know. It should be one that will unite the nation on moderate policies. I represent six million people who have voted for this kind of government."

One reporter asked Mr Thorpe what it felt like to be inside

Number 10. He replied laughing: "It is not the first time I have been there and I sincerely hope it will not be the last."

On 10 June 1977, when Penrose and Courtiour met Mr Heath, they asked him about the discussions he had had with the Liberal leader back in March 1974. Had the implications of the allegations which had reached him just before the Election influenced him at all when he invited Mr Thorpe to join him in a coalition? If such serious allegations were being made could they not in time come to embarrass any new government?

The former Prime Minister replied pointedly, "Then you have to consider a completely fresh new situation which one doesn't want to discuss."

Penrose tried to ask the question again in another form, but Mr Heath interrupted and said: "You won't get an answer."

Another person who could obtain no answer from Conservative Party headquarters was Tim Keigwin, the Conservative candidate for North Devon. When he enquired what had happened about the material which John Palmer had taken up to London, all he heard was that efforts were being made to contact Peter Bessell who had been involved with the "retainer" letters. But Bessell had apparently gone to America and could not be traced. He was to tell Courtiour later that he had "disappeared" over the border into Mexico on 12 January – the same day as the helicopter incident.

"Little seemed to be done about it," said Keigwin, although the North Devon party believed that the Scott story raised other issues beyond anything that might directly affect an election campaign. It was a question of the behaviour of a prominent public figure, a Privy Councillor. They believed there were matters of national security to be considered – if, of course, Scott's allegations had any foundation.

Penrose had already mentioned to Lord Carrington that the North Devon Tories were apparently worried about the security aspects which were raised by the contents of Norman Scott's manuscript. "When you hear about that sort of thing," he said, "having had a certain experience in the Services department, that obviously comes into your mind . . . But I don't know, I didn't read it." It did seem logical that if Lord Carrington had not read the Scott manuscript, as his colleagues had none the less done, he would not be aware of the security implications.

The reporters were however still curious to know at what point, in circumstances where such allegations had been made, a man

who was not only an MP but also a Privy Councillor was considered as a potential security risk. The Report of the Conference of Privy Councillors (Cmnd 9715) in 1956, which had examined the defection of Burgess and Maclean, stated that as well as Communist sympathies, character "faults" should also be reason for exclusion from many government posts – "failings such as drunkenness, addiction to drugs, homosexuality, or any loose living". The Report went on to say (paragraph 16) that it was "right to continue the practice of tilting the balance in favour of offering greater protection to the security of the State rather than in the direction of safeguarding the rights of the individual".

Mr Heath asked what the supposed "security element" in the question meant, and Penrose replied that he was thinking of a case where allegations might turn out to be true.

"What security information could he possibly have?" said Mr Heath. "You have got to get your time phasing right in all of this. Before the Election there was no suggestion of Thorpe or of a Liberal coalition. Absolutely none."

"But as a Privy Councillor?" said Courtiour, wishing to add that there was no suggestion that Mr Thorpe had ever passed on confidential information.

"The number of people who, certainly under my Government, have security information is minute," stressed Mr Heath. "Minute. From the point of view of having discussions with opposition leaders about particular problems, I don't think I ever had discussions with Thorpe. I did, of course, have discussions with Wilson . . . What I want to put clearly in your mind is that as far as I know this question of security never came up and if it had one would have just given a hollow laugh. Because he couldn't possibly have had the information. There's no committee in the House of Commons which gives people security information. At least, there wasn't at the time. It may be now that with this committee on foreign affairs they may give out some information."

But was Mr Heath speaking merely about "ordinary" MPs who were not part of the inner circle of government? If, after the February 1974 Election, the Conservatives were offering the Liberal leader a real share in the running of the country, did that not imply that they were prepared to offer him a key post in the Government in which he would be privy to the most secret decisions? This thought had certainly crossed the mind of Tim Keigwin who had resigned as Tory candidate very shortly after-

wards. "What would have happened," said Keigwin, "if he had been made Minister of Defence?"

Penrose asked Edward Heath if he had not considered offering a Cabinet position to Mr Thorpe at that time of behind-the-scenes bargaining.

"Then it becomes a question," he said, "of which Liberal would have been offered a Cabinet position." Apparently what had been on offer was one Cabinet post and one other job in Government. But Mr Heath added: "We didn't get to the stage of negotiating who would have which Cabinet position."

"We had our first discussions on the Saturday evening," the former Prime Minister explained. "He said he wished to go and discuss with his colleagues. He said in fact he wished to discuss with his Party which was due to meet on the Tuesday. I asked him to bring the meeting forward. He said he would discuss it with his colleagues on the Sunday. They brought the meeting forward to Monday. I gave him the facts." In a letter from 10 Downing Street, dated 4 March 1974, the Prime Minister appeared to offer the Liberal leader in person "a seat in the Cabinet with Ministerial appointment for some other members of your Party".

"On this latter basis," he wrote, "of course, you as a member of the Government would have a voice in all the Government's decisions. At the same time your Party would be committed to support the Government in the House of Commons."

Increasingly, however, there were uneasy murmurings inside the Liberal Party against any pact with the Conservatives. A threat that any Parliamentary deal by Mr Thorpe with Mr Heath would lead to mass resignations from the Party was made by Peter Hain, the former Young Liberal leader who was now a member of the Party's National Executive.

"Rank and file Liberals," he said in a Press statement, "did not campaign to keep Mr Heath in power."

But such an arrangement was not to be. On the same day that the letter arrived from Mr Heath, the fourteen Liberal Members of Parliament, including Jeremy Thorpe, met and unanimously rejected his offer. And after two hasty meetings of his Cabinet, Edward Heath went to Buckingham Palace and tendered his resignation to the Queen. By half past seven that evening, Harold Wilson had been summoned and had gone through the traditional ceremony of kissing the Monarch's hand on taking office. The Labour Party was back in power, though with no over-all majority.

Penrose and Courtiour were left now to weigh up the possibilities, both of what had happened exactly in the secret exchanges between the political leaders that weekend, and what could have happened if Jeremy Thorpe had ended up in a Ministerial position of trust and power. There seemed to be no doubt that, although the Conservative Prime Minister might not personally have read the material which had arrived from North Devon, someone among his senior Party advisers certainly had and the matter had been duly drawn to his attention. Would he then have called for a report on the situation from his Security Chiefs, as a Prime Minister was entitled to do? Or would the question of the Scott affair, and its consequences, have been kept within the walls of Conservative Central Office? No one had suggested to Penrose and Courtiour that Scott's manuscript had been passed to the Intelligence Services: in fact it seemed to have been locked away very carefully at Conservative Party Headquarters. So what was the burden of the Party political advice Edward Heath had received?

Both reporters felt fairly certain that no shrewd politician who was contemplating the difficult task of governing such a crisis-ridden country without an overall majority could have afforded to ignore the allegations that had been made against Jeremy Thorpe. Even if the allegations were unfounded, the climate of opinion in Britain was still unfortunately such that Thorpe and any other politicians who chose to associate with him were likely to be damaged. And that would immediately endanger a Conservative Government that depended on the voting strength of Thorpe and the Liberals for its survival. The two Parties already looked like strange political bedfellows, and they would be climbing into a bed that had one corner resting on a marshmallow.

Nevertheless, prior to the Election, the instruction which Heath had referred to as the "general rule" forbidding Conservatives to allude to the Thorpe-Scott material during the campaign had helped to ensure that Thorpe and the Liberal Party were not hampered from reaching Parliament. Naturally, it could be said that Keigwin was already inhibited by the advice he had received from Tory Central Office, and that Lord Carrington's instruction was merely sound advice. Then, after the Election, when there was a stalemate situation between the two main Parties and Heath made his offer to Thorpe, would their discussions not have included any mention of the danger from Norman Scott? It seemed

unlikely that the danger would actually have been ignored, although in any discussion possibly the word "blackmail" would have come up as it had on other occasions. In any such discussion, too, it might have been asked whether Scott was in possession of any documentary evidence which could be used in an attempt to substantiate his allegations. And then the action of David Holmes over the £2,500 payment and the destruction of Scott's file might have assumed somewhat more importance than either Holmes or anyone had been willing to attribute to it.

It had to be taken into consideration, of course, that Heath did not form a coalition with Thorpe in spite of the last-minute discussions in March 1974. Nevertheless the reporters wondered whether Heath and his Party had really been prepared to take the risk of offering a Cabinet position to a politician who might become a target for blackmail. Whatever interpretations might be imposed on the actions of Norman Scott, if the Government Report of the Conference of Privy Councillors was to be taken seriously, there was also a *prima facie* risk that foreign powers with knowledge of the Scott allegations might attempt to use such material if Mr Thorpe had accepted a Cabinet post in a Heath administration.

In his book *The Political Police in Britain*, Tony Bunyan suggested that "MPs and Ministers are, in the eyes of MI5, as much a threat to security as civil servants – perhaps more so because the state has less control over them".

Speaking to the Franks Committee in 1974, Sir Martin Furnival-Jones, the Director-General of MI5, had also confirmed that foreign powers were interested in Britain's State secrets and an individual's personal foibles. Sir Martin was asked if Members of Parliament might be targets for foreign powers and replied: "I do not think I can answer that question. It would involve my having indulged in an activity in which I certainly do not indulge, and that is informing myself of the total circle of acquaintances of every MP . . . I can certainly say that very many MPs are in contact with very many intelligence officers."

Sir Martin explained further: "No doubt many MPs, many people, enter the House of Commons in the hope of becoming Ministers. If the Russian Intelligence Service can recruit a back-bench MP, and he continues to hold his seat for a number of years and climbs the ladder to a Ministerial position, it is obvious the spy is home and dry."

Sir Martin was referring to the attention Communist agents gave to MPs, but in recent years the South African Security Services had also presented British Intelligence with increasing problems. The scenario Sir Martin painted around the Russian Intelligence Service might equally apply to the Bureau of State Security's activities inside Britain. If Gordon Winter's material had reached the South Africans in 1971, or later when the journalist returned to Johannesburg, the implications could be extremely far-reaching. BOSS in Pretoria might have been very tempted to employ the information about the Liberal leader which they had stored away in the past. Indeed Sir Harold Wilson told the reporters in 1976 that it was his firm belief that South Africans had actually used information against Thorpe. A politician who had entered the British Cabinet in March 1974 could have remained there throughout the constitutional life of that particular Government which could have given him access to every top level secret decision taken by Her Majesty's Ministers up until the spring of 1979. And this was a period of crucial world diplomacy, particularly over the balance of power in Southern Africa – an area in which British experience and thinking had always played a major role.

In the end, of course, foreign secret services and Prime Ministers deal with the realities of a political situation and not with what might have been. And what happened in reality was that Jeremy Thorpe never accepted the offer from Edward Heath to form a coalition. Was this merely because the fourteen Liberal MPs chose of their own accord not to unite with the Conservative Party? Penrose wondered why they had been so unanimous in their decision to reject the secret offer rather than grasp this golden opportunity, which the Liberals had been seeking for decades, to have a hand in the running of the country. The reporter found this a trifle puzzling, since he had spoken to some of the same MPs in 1976 and they had been quite prepared to cooperate then with a Government whose policies did not entirely accord with their own.

One difference was that by the time of the "Lib-Lab accommodation" in the autumn of 1976 Jeremy Thorpe had ceased to be the Liberal leader.

## Chapter 22

With Edward Heath's resignation on 4 March 1974, Harold Wilson quickly moved back into 10 Downing Street and took over the helm again. But he found himself master of a very storm-tossed ship. Sir Harold had spoken to Courtiour and Penrose about the extent of the crisis he faced that year. His new Labour administration had inherited the continuing State of Emergency which the Conservatives had imposed at the end of the previous year: the miners were still on strike; and the nation was riddled with collective fears about a breakdown of law and order, the rampaging power of the unions and the spectre of national bankruptcy. According to the American Hudson Institute on the basis of conditions obtaining at that time, Britain would have a lower standard of living by 1980 than the "poor" Mediterranean and Balkan states of Spain and Greece.

Sir Harold also reminded the reporters that the outcome of the February 1974 Election had not helped to restore stability.

In October 1964 Harold Wilson had won the Election with an over-all majority of 5 seats whereas now he was forming a Government with 17 seats fewer than the combined strength of the opposition. When he took office he already knew that there would have to be a second election that year. The state of the country demanded a Government with a firm over-all majority, otherwise it would be too vulnerable to the whims of a mutinous crew at Westminster. The hope was that he could conduct a similar operation to the one he had pulled off in 1966 when he had called an election by the time his over-all majority had slumped to 3. On that earlier occasion he had returned to power in triumph with a comfortable majority of 97.

The plan now would be for the new Labour Government to put through a number of quick, effective measures which would bolster its strength and then to make a dash for the polls to secure a working majority.

In their first meetings with Sir Harold he had also spoken at

length about other, more insidious problems which had assailed his first administration of 1974.

The suggestion was that these events were part of a malignant operation to assassinate the Labour leader's character and cause his Party to lose the forthcoming battle.

To begin with, Sir Harold told the reporters that there had been more than a dozen burglaries at his homes and offices and at those of his professional advisers. He was convinced that some of these could well have been arranged by South African "agents" and others connected with so-called "intelligence gathering". In particular, tax papers had been stolen from his house in Lord North Street.

Shortly before this, other tax documents, personal letters, photographs and tape-recordings, relating to Harold Wilson and his exchanges with President Nixon and the Rhodesian Premier, Ian Smith, had been stolen from a room in Buckingham Palace Road where they had been stored.

Some of the burglaries had been made public by the police, but others had not yet been disclosed in the Press. For one thing Scotland Yard had only caught two men so far. Two years after the robbery in Buckingham Palace Road, Maurice Henn, businessman who ran a private delivery service, and Khalail Waifai, a Lebanese stationery salesman, were charged with stealing property belonging to the then Prime Minister and later found guilty at the Old Bailey.

At a meeting with Sir Harold on Tuesday 16 November 1976, Penrose asked him whether he was not making too much of these robberies, however numerous they had been. It was an established fact that Henn and Waifai were not South Africans. And the man who recovered the stolen files, a well-known figure in Soho called Nicky Nichols, was certainly not a South African. Nichols told Detective Chief Superintendent Roy Ranson that he had paid £2,500 to a stranger in London's Great Portland Street to get them back for the Labour Prime Minister. "I did it", he was reported as saying, "because I felt it was my public duty to get my hands on the papers when they were offered to me." Penrose went over these facts and asked Sir Harold whether he would not agree that the thefts might just be an odd coincidence, in much the same way that an attempted break-in at his home probably had an innocent explanation.

"There've been too many of them, far too many," said Sir

Harold emphatically. "Roy Ranson, he's one of Scotland Yard's top detectives: he found some good material. He was one of those who said about the South African connection."

Penrose asked if the detective had talked about "South African business interests" being behind the robberies.

"A connection," said Sir Harold. "He didn't say what it was. You ought to talk with him."

The ex-Premier listed the further robberies which had occurred in recent years. There had been break-ins at the offices of Lord Goodman, Sir Harold's chief legal adviser. A lawyer acting for Anthony Field, the brother of his Personal and Political Secretary Lady Falkender, had also had a break-in. So had Jean Denham, who once worked in his Press Office at 10 Downing Street. And there had been two burglaries at the home of the late Michael Halls, a former Permanent Private Secretary to him at Number 10.

Leaning forward in his chair like a patient confiding embarrassing symptoms to his doctor, Sir Harold talked about even more thefts which had recently come to light. "You know I'm doing this programme with David Frost? It's about British Prime Ministers of the past. Well, there was a break-in at Yorkshire Television's contracts department. I've not talked about this publicly to anybody."

Sir Harold thought there was a distinct possibility that somebody was interested to know the terms of his contract and how much he was being paid to appear on the Frost programmes. And he had other news to give them.

"... But what I didn't tell you was that Marcia was broken into for a second time, in the country," he said. Lady Falkender's cottage, which was not far from his own house, near Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire, Grange Farm, had been visited by thieves at the beginning of November.

Sir Harold went on to explain how the burglars had got into the cottage, through a window at the back. A villager had noticed some footprints near the cottage and had become suspicious. Later the villager had described the scene he discovered after the robbery. From the man's account, and Lady Falkender's description, Sir Harold had concluded that this was more than just an ordinary robbery.

"You'd think if they were looking for anything valuable they'd rummage through drawers and through cabinets," he said. "In the sense that a lady who had any jewellery would keep it behind a

nightie or somewhere of that sort. In a relatively harmless place but not a drawer."

Sir Harold was suspicious that only one drawer had apparently been opened. He thought it could well have been left open to make the police believe it was an ordinary theft. What he found significant was that papers were out and had obviously been examined. He said the police had found no fingerprints. It had crossed his mind that the thieves might have been planting bugs – listening devices that would enable someone to hear what was being said in the cottage.

"A friend of Lady Falkender, Sir James Goldsmith, has a large number of 'buggers', I mean 'de-buggers', not 'buggers'," said Sir Harold, correcting his mistake. "And he's going to do my place at Great Missenden." (In fact Grange Farm was to be burgled in April 1977 when documents relating to South Africa and other papers were stolen.)

Once more the ex-Prime Minister said that he could not believe that all these break-ins were merely a chance affair.

"The coincidence is far too great," he said with obvious exasperation at the mystery.

The conversation then turned back to 1974 and to an associated incident Sir Harold had mentioned several times before. In August 1974 Lady Falkender and her sister Peggy Field were at their London mews home when suddenly they heard the noise of running footsteps outside. They paid no particular attention to the sound but later that evening Peggy Field discovered that her handbag was missing from the small table in the hall.

Then, just before ten o'clock, a man with a foreign accent had telephoned and said he had found a lady's handbag. He said that if the lady would like to have it back she could collect it from a nearby block of apartments. He gave an address: 6a Bickinhall Mansions, London W1. Peggy Field had passed by the block on countless occasions.

"The whole thing was peculiar from the beginning, we thought," said Lady Falkender's sister. "The man had what sounded like a Eurasian accent and kept insisting we called in person to collect the bag. One would have expected most people to hand it in to the police."

At the time Lady Falkender was, of course, the Prime Minister's Political Secretary and Peggy Field was his wife's private secretary. Because of the numerous odd incidents that had been taking place

that year they mentioned it to the Prime Minister. In turn the matter had been taken up by his Special Branch bodyguard. But the Prime Minister and the sisters became suspicious when they were not given a satisfactory explanation for what had occurred. Who was the strange caller and why had he wanted them to collect the bag *in person*? It reminded Sir Harold of an incident in which an attempt had allegedly been made to compromise a prominent Labour Cabinet Minister sexually. He could not rule out the possibility that if the sisters had gone to collect the handbag in person they might have been entering a well-laid trap. He said that in the distasteful world of foreign espionage and agents, using "dirty tricks" to compromise people was fairly common practice, and in this instance such tactics were not wholly inconceivable. Lady Falkender and Peggy Field, he said, might have been thrown into a room where an orgy was taking place and photographed. Such an incident could then have been used to discredit the Labour Prime Minister, his Government and his Party, even though the victims would have been quite innocent.

The reporters in examining this theory had first checked the date of the incident with Paddington Police Station. A CID officer called Peter Murphy confirmed that the handbag snatch had taken place on 12 August 1974. It appeared to have been a relatively trivial incident from the CID's records. The bag had contained a brooch, keys, a cheque-book and about £4 in cash. Murphy said the only thing stolen seemed to have been the money. In fact, this was something else which had aroused the sisters' suspicions. Why had the thief not bothered to take the expensive brooch and the cheque-book? – a fact which the detective agreed was rather unusual.

At Bickinhall Mansions itself Courtiour spoke to a porter, a man of Portuguese origin called Antonio Soares, who recalled the handbag affair instantly. A lady had noticed it outside Apartment 110 and called him to look at it, thinking it might be an IRA bomb.

The 26-year-old porter, who by then had been living in London for five years, took the suggestion seriously.

Soares claimed he knocked at the door of Number 110 and asked if the Countess de Vismes had left her handbag outside the door by mistake. The man who answered replied that the bag did not belong to the Countess. Nervously the porter had then opened the bag and seen the name Peggy Field and a local telephone

number. He had then called the number and in his fractured English (which had since improved) reported that he had found the handbag, and said that if she wanted to come he would give it to her.

Antonio Soares was not told by the police that it belonged to someone who worked very close to the British Prime Minister. He forgot the affair and had heard no more about it until Courtiour arrived on his doorstep. He said he knew nothing about South Africans or parties in the flats. The porter had simply found a bag inside an apartment block to which the front door was usually locked, and had tried to return it to the rightful owner.

That part of the story appeared straightforward enough, but neither the police nor the reporters had satisfactorily unravelled why the thief who had snatched the bag from Lady Falkender's home had not taken the costly brooch and the cheque-book. And how did the bag end up inside Bickinhall Mansions and not in the gutter or the river? Was the theft part of a more complicated plot?

At their 16 November meeting with Sir Harold the reporters mentioned that they had made some enquiries about the handbag theft. Penrose said they had spoken to CID officers at Paddington.

"They did log it then?" Sir Harold asked suspiciously.

"Yes," they both answered.

"Marcia had trouble before with Paddington," he went on. "There was a girl at Number 10 who was living with, or engaged to, a supposedly right-wing fascist policeman. She was a secretary and went there to fight the second election." The ex-Premier said he had moved into an office at Transport House, the Labour Party headquarters, before the October 1974 Election and the secretary had been assigned to his staff there.

"The first day this girl was there," he said, "I rang up the Principal Private Secretary and said: 'I want her out.' And she was sent straight back." It was not the first time that he had spoken of individual police officers he disliked, particularly men from the Special Branch.

Sir Harold said he was also particularly bitter about some sections of Fleet Street and the methods and stories which he said had been directed against himself and members of the Prime Minister's office, such as the speculations about Marcia Williams and the storm over his resignation Honours List. As journalists, Courtiour and Penrose were naturally cautious when outsiders



criticised the Press in such a generalised manner, especially when the attacks came from politicians. In their view it was often healthier for reporters and politicians to keep their distance from each other. Cordial relations were not always the best climate for tough and accurate investigative stories about matters of public interest. For years the former Prime Minister, aided by his official Press Secretary Joe Haines, had enjoyed a love-hate relationship with the media as a whole and he was not exactly a defenceless mugging victim. Perhaps Sir Harold was really being too sensitive about Press criticism of his policies and government record, some of it no doubt well deserved?

But the former Prime Minister's deep misgivings about the Press were also backed up by his Political Secretary Lady Falkender. In the series of meetings the reporters had with her, she explained some of the reasons behind her own and Sir Harold's mistrust. It was a fact, she said, that almost every major national newspaper in Britain was owned, and usually edited, by conservative-minded men who were avowedly Tory in outlook. This was also true, she contended, of many of the local newspapers up and down the country. It therefore followed that the Conservatives could expect more sympathetic treatment, if not out-and-out propaganda, to support their political philosophy.

Naturally the Press did tend to mould public attitudes on many major issues. Few people, she argued, would deny that Harold Wilson and his Labour Government had been savaged by the Press between the two elections of 1974. There had been right-wing pressure groups, she said, behind a series of well-orchestrated stories which had appeared suddenly in 1974.

Sir Harold had revealed to Penrose and Courtiour that his concern related to more than just the Press bias. He had told them he was perturbed about certain links between a section of the British Security Services and the circulation of damaging stories about himself and his colleagues. There were grounds for concern about the whole area of relations between, for instance, MI5 and the Prime Minister's office and about interruptions in the flow of vital information between civil servants and politicians.

In view of these remarks and what the former Prime Minister had said at their meetings, it was clear to the reporters that they would need to learn rather more about the British Security Services than they knew already. The problem that they faced however was that, unlike the CIA with its Press Office at

Langley, Virginia, the British Secret Service had no numbers that ordinary journalists could call for information about its activities.

In direct contrast to the new American attitude, there was no listing for MI5 or MI6 in the London telephone directories, let alone an actual Press Office. It was easy to believe that the organisations only existed in the minds of thriller writers.

Only after a good war, it seemed, did British spies drop what appeared to be a traditional modesty. The exploits of British Intelligence during the Second World War were legion if the countless books about them were accurate. Yet in peacetime conditions MI5 and 6 kept their activities and physical whereabouts a closely guarded secret.

Under the Official Secrets Act it could even be an offence to attempt to obtain information about the Secret Service's organisation, personnel or activities.

As Prime Minister, Harold Wilson had been titular head of British Intelligence, just as Edward Heath had been before him. He was also responsible ultimately for the Intelligence departments of the Army, Navy and Air Force which fell under the direct day-to-day control of the Ministry of Defence. Yet Sir Harold had given the reporters the distinct impression that his role as over-all Intelligence chief was largely a matter of name only. He found in office that he did not really know a great deal of what was going on, and he had therefore come to believe that the Security Services should be more directly accountable to Ministers. As far as the Government was concerned he appeared to want the Secret Service to be less waywardly secret.

In his book *The Labour Government 1964—70*, Harold Wilson had described some of the reasons behind his appointment of George Wigg, now Lord Wigg, as Paymaster-General with special responsibility in the field of security. The appointment at the beginning of his first Labour Government was made, he said, because "the last few years of the Conservative Administration suggested that there was still too much laxity in the operation of security procedures, with all too obvious confusion of where responsibility lay." The Prime Minister went on to claim that Lord Wigg's three years "on this – and other – work, did more for our security services, and their place in the system of government, than has ever been guessed at. For obvious reasons it can neither be described nor fully evaluated."

Sir Harold's original anxieties clearly went back to the days of the Profumo affair in 1963 and the crucial disadvantages from which the Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had suffered through not having received adequate information from his Security Services. On 17 June 1963 Macmillan had revealed in a speech to Parliament how ill-informed he had been of the facts surrounding the case. The Denning Report into the affair had subsequently concluded that the Security Services had been in control of the situation. But they had clearly not informed the Prime Minister of the day.

Harold Wilson had been clearly concerned that a similar uncommunicativeness of the Secret Service should never jeopardise either his own position or that of his Government. But a decade after George Wigg's appointment he was apparently still not wholly satisfied that he had solved the security problem.

Penrose and Courtiour wondered, however, whether it was merely that during his years of office he and George Wigg had still not succeeded in perfecting the mechanics of how the Security Services passed on their information to the Prime Minister. In an interview with a top MI5 official, now retired, the two reporters were told that the information gathered by that branch of the Service was passed on to the Home Secretary. It was then a matter for him – rather than the Prime Minister – to decide what use to make of the information.

"Thank God we do not have a political police in this country," the experienced Security man had told them. "The job of the Service is to provide the information and make recommendations. If the recommendations are ignored for political reasons, then there is nothing that we can do about it."

The clear implication was that if the former Prime Minister had not known the facts, then the culprits were his political colleagues, and not his Secret Service. It would, their informant explained, be very difficult to go direct to the Prime Minister with information, although that could be done.

Edward Heath had also spoken to the reporters about another existing rupture in the line of communication between the Security Services and any new Prime Minister. He had told them that security matters were so restricted that he had not even briefed Wilson when he was in power. And neither had Wilson briefed him when he had been Opposition leader. It was possible therefore

that in the United Kingdom a politician might be less than fully aware of what had taken place during the time of his predecessor.

A third and possibly more important factor was that on occasion a politician might actually prefer not to know what a particular branch of the Security Services was doing. The reporters wondered to what extent it was necessary for any Security chief to use his discretion, and whether Sir Harold acknowledged that sometimes there were good reasons for a withholding of information.

At Lord North Street one afternoon Sir Harold had told them about a briefing he had been asked to attend just before a planned trip to the USSR in the summer of 1971 when he was in Opposition. Sir Dennis Greenhill, a Chairman of DIC and a Deputy Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, had asked him to call in before the trip. At the end of the briefing, Sir Dennis indicated that during the visit an embarrassing situation might arise in the security field. Would he like to know the background? Wilson had refused the information, pointing out that security was no longer his responsibility.

The information which Harold Wilson had declined to hear was that the Soviet Union had established a network of espionage agents in the UK operating throughout the country. The information came from a Russian defector, Oleg Lyalin and resulted in the expulsion by the Conservative Government of no fewer than 105 Soviet diplomats whom they accused of espionage and sabotage activities. Sir Harold mentioned to the two reporters that the Russians had felt it courageous of him to continue his visit in the circumstances. They of course could not believe that he had known nothing of the impending expulsions.

In relation to the situation in 1974, there were of course, additional reasons why Harold Wilson might fear that his grip on the Secret Service was not firm enough. Between the two Elections of that year he did not need to look far to see other Western leaders having difficulties with their Intelligence agencies. On 6 May that year Chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany, a friend of the British Prime Minister and a fellow social democrat, resigned ostensibly as a result of revelations about an East German spy on his personal staff. In the United States the Watergate affair, involving the CIA in the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters and in the well-publicised scandal which followed, was to end in President Nixon's ignominious exit from

political life. That too was during this same period, on 9 August 1974.

The Labour Prime Minister might well have wondered at the time how the West German Socialist leader could have such an apparently lax Secret Service. How could such a highly placed spy as Günter Guillaume remain loose on Chancellor Brandt's staff for so long and with such calamitous results? Why had the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, the West German equivalent of Britain's MI5 which was responsible for domestic counter-espionage, not caught or informed him about Guillaume earlier?

In the case of President Nixon, a politician not above using the American Intelligence agencies on occasion for his own personal objectives, it was odd that the CIA should also have played a role in his downfall. If so much information about the Watergate scandal and Nixon's involvement in it had not reached the Press, allegedly from CIA sources, the public might never have known more than a small part of the truth of that bizarre affair. From the unfortunate examples of Brandt and Nixon it seemed that Chancellors, Presidents – and perhaps Prime Ministers – had reason to be suspicious of their Security Agencies. Penrose and Courtiour gradually realised that Harold Wilson's concern went far deeper than mere anxiety about the mechanics of how the civil servants responsible for British Security communicated with their titular chief, the Prime Minister.

In recent years the Cabinet Office in Downing Street had had a Coordinator of Intelligence and Security. His task was to provide Prime Ministers with up-to-the-minute reports and appraisals of political situations, with security angles in mind. The position had to some extent been created originally to counter-balance some of the criticisms Harold Wilson had made in the past, so the mechanics of communication had already been greatly improved. Yet apparently right up to his surprise resignation announcement in March 1976 he continued, privately at least, to have growing reservations about the Security Services. In their conversations with him, the reporters were led to believe that a section of the Security Services and other senior civil servants had actively opposed and blocked his policies while he was in power.

The suggestion of a conflict between civil servants and politicians was not new to the reporters. Indeed it had become almost routine for former Cabinet Ministers to include in their memoirs details of the battles they had had with their senior civil servants.

But Sir Harold seemed to be suggesting an altogether more sinister level of interference which bordered on professional treachery. He had told them quite bluntly not to believe civil servants on certain matters and had also mentioned actual links between his political enemies and the British Security Services. He had not ruled out the possibility that individuals working inside MI5 and MI6 had contributed to the "smears" which he complained had frequently appeared in the Press while he had been at Number 10. He told the reporters that some people in the Security Services were "very right-wing" and "blinkered".

At their meetings Sir Harold stressed that he was not worried about the normal gossip which might be expected from the Right about a Socialist Prime Minister but about stories which were circulated on the basis that the information came from Security sources and was therefore above suspicion.

Sir Harold went on to say that the story about the "Communist cell" had been told in all seriousness and eventually it had reached his ears at Downing Street. The historian Martin Gilbert had overheard one version of it at a London dinner party he had attended. According to Sir Harold, Gilbert had pulled up his chair behind the man making the remarks and had made some notes. The historian had later sent a copy of the alleged remarks to the Labour Prime Minister and to the person who had originally made them at the party. The man, a well-known Fleet Street journalist, was widely believed to have first-class connections with MI5 and MI6. It was those departments which were supposed to have "evidence" that the Prime Minister and Lady Falkender, along with other Labour Ministers, had formed the "Communist cell" at 10 Downing Street.

Winston Churchill, the young Tory MP and grandson of the famous wartime Leader, had also heard the story, Sir Harold said.

When Courtiour rang Winston Churchill, the MP said firmly, "I certainly haven't heard any stories that Harold Wilson was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party at any stage of his life." But he did offer an explanation for why such loose talk might have been believed.

"The question mark that does arise in many people's minds," he said, "is the fact that he has paid no fewer than nineteen visits to the Soviet Union. And that does provide the other side with certain opportunities. Have you been able to find out how many occasions Miss Williams accompanied him behind the Iron Curtain?"

Not only Sir Harold, but also Lady Falkender – to whom Churchill had referred as “Miss Williams” – had expressed indignation that such stories were told and accepted on such flimsy grounds.

“These people have access to your files and have vetted you and know all about you,” she told the two reporters. “So when they put it out, they know that they are putting out a deliberate lie. If they don’t, then what is it that stops them getting to the information that clears you?”

She believed that the persistent rumours that went around were deliberately started and then exploited by people linked with Intelligence activities. She agreed with Sir Harold that a Royal Commission was needed to examine the over-all accountability of the Security Services. In the context of the odd events which had happened before he left Number 10 such a Commission was essential. She believed that the subject, which was still shrouded in unnecessary mystery, should be carefully examined: the veil should be removed. For one thing many people would like to know about the supposed “links” between South African Intelligence and the British Secret Service. There were also other foreign Intelligence agencies which had strong ties with MI5 and 6. How, she wondered, were those ties used? But were she and Sir Harold right to ascribe political and possibly treasonable motives to civil servants or Intelligence people who were not only keeping the Prime Minister informed but actually working against him? Other leads which Sir Harold gave them did seem to indicate that the Security Services were involved in something rather more disturbing than the spreading of distasteful personal and political rumours.

There had been a threat to mount a smear against a Labour Minister by a section of the Security Services. A letter written by Colonel “Sammy” Lohan, Secretary of the D-Notice Committee, was intercepted through the good offices of Tory MP Captain Henry Kerby.

“Apparently the Security people involved had a photograph of a Minister with a hand on the girl’s knee,” Sir Harold told the reporters without a trace of humour in his face. “It was taken,” he said, “at the White Tower Restaurant.”

Moreover the young lady was said by people in Security to have Communist affiliations. Lohan had proposed that the matter be made public as part of a campaign to bring down the Labour

Government. In fact MI5 had raised the matter with the Home Secretary who had informed Harold Wilson of the accusation, who in turn had passed the matter on to George Wigg whose special responsibility was security. Wigg had seen the Minister involved and satisfied himself that the matter had no substance.

That particular incident could have caused grave embarrassment to the Labour Government if the people concerned had caused it to become known.

A more simple but none the less worrying incident had occurred in 1969. Josef Frolik, an agent of the Czech Intelligence network, defected to the Americans and in the course of his interrogation by the CIA he disclosed that three British MPs were passing secrets to Czech Intelligence in London. He gave the Americans two names, John Stonehouse and Will Owen, and they passed them on to the British.

Shortly after this the Head of MI5 had one of his rare meetings with Harold Wilson. Only the two men were present and they later disagreed as to the significance of the conversation that took place. According to the Head of MI5, they merely exchanged information. Wilson, however, had been left with the impression that the Secret Service Chief suspected that the Owen mentioned by Frolik was *David* Owen, the outstanding young politician who was at that time Under Secretary of State for the Royal Navy and was later to become the British Foreign Secretary.

Harold Wilson had at once pointed out what he was sure must be an error but had been startled that such an elementary mistake should have been made.

In the event John Stonehouse was cleared by MI5 and Will Owen was cleared in May of 1970 at the Old Bailey of passing secrets to the Czechs, although he had admitted to receiving money from them over a period of several years.

Another example was cited which showed how dangerous the over-secretiveness of the Security Services could be when it was combined with right-wing prejudice and the kind of bureaucratic incompetence which can occasionally arise in any government department. By a coincidence, this incident too took place between the two General Elections in 1974, at a time when Harold Wilson and his entourage were suffering from other provocations.

In his spring Cabinet the Labour Premier had made Mrs Judith Hart the Minister of Overseas Development.

In terms of the Commonwealth, and Britain’s post-colonial

image abroad, the Ministry of Overseas Development was important but it was not exactly a step upward for a capable politician who was perhaps expecting a higher post.

Judith Hart first entered Parliament in 1959, and had later been a Minister at the DHSS, and then at the Commonwealth Office. In 1967 she had become a Privy Councillor, but she had still not become a full member of the Cabinet, a natural extension of her career.

Then shortly before the Parliamentary recess in the summer of 1974 Mrs Hart was summoned to meet the Prime Minister. In the course of the meeting, Harold Wilson let it be known in a roundabout manner that there was a problem over her security clearance. Mrs Hart was mildly shocked and wondered why such a question had suddenly been raised sixteen years after she had entered Parliament and ten years since she had first become a Minister. And why should Harold be enquiring about certain visits she had made abroad? He asked her if she had ever been to Warsaw, and Mrs Hart replied that, apart from a camping holiday in Yugoslavia and one visit to the Soviet Union with a Parliamentary group, she had not travelled in Eastern Europe at all.

She was to hear nothing further on the subject for about three months.

From their covert enquiries on this occasion MI5 had apparently come to the firm conclusion that a Minister of the Crown, the Right Honourable Judith Hart, was a possible security risk and had conveyed to a horrified and incredulous Harold Wilson that the Minister had had strong Communist sympathies in the past and indeed one of her two sons was still a member of the British Communist Party. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Mrs Hart had made trips behind the Iron Curtain.

Harold Wilson's existing doubts about the blinkered attitudes in Intelligence probably saved the situation. He had strong suspicions that there had been a serious error somewhere and gave instructions that further security checks were to be made on Judith Hart. In the meantime he would take the responsibility of allowing her to carry on as Minister of Overseas Development.

On the telephone to the Minister, Penrose was having a hard time. She asked him for more background details of what he was doing and what he was trying to find out. He mentioned MI5 and that a story had gone around that some people at the top of the last Wilson Government had formed a Communist cell. As he repeated

the story he had been told, he was conscious that it sounded very odd, even ridiculous. He hoped Mrs Hart would not hang up.

"This may sound quite absurd to you," the reporter said self-consciously, aware that Mrs Hart was saying nothing on the other end of the line, "— that British civil servants could have been putting such a story — about Communist cells and Moscow — about to discredit Labour Ministers . . ."

He was getting nowhere with the conversation. Mrs Hart genuinely did not seem to know what he was talking about.

"Well this is extremely interesting," she said, sounding as if she meant the exact opposite.

"But it doesn't ring any bells with you at all?" asked Penrose, desperately trying to disguise the disappointment showing through in his voice.

"It rings, yes, now you give me the full background," she sounded completely in control, almost toying with the reporter. "It rings a bell. But why are you asking me? To confirm or something?"

"No," replied Penrose, "because I don't suppose you can."

"No," said the Minister.

"Damn it, you are in the Government. It is difficult for you to do that. I understand."

"Yes," said Mrs Hart.

"I wanted just to let you know in advance that we are mentioning it," the reporter added, not knowing what else to say.

Mrs Hart paused. "Yes, now, well, I will tell you," she began again. "How can I put it tactfully? There was an enquiry about me at the very top — Prime Ministerial — level in 1974. But I did not know, because it was not revealed to me, that there had been this confusion with another family."

Penrose had already mentioned that MI5 had made a mistake in her case. There was another woman called Mrs Hart who had apparently travelled behind the Iron Curtain and aroused MI5's interest. Her husband, like the Minister's, was called Dr Anthony Hart. The Labour Minister said she knew there had been some confusion with their namesakes in the past.

Mrs Hart said that back in 1950 when she was a Labour candidate but had not yet entered Parliament, a Special Branch police inspector had approached the full-time Labour agent in Poole, Freddy Reeves. The Inspector had asked the Labour agent if Judith Hart had been in Warsaw to attend an international peace

conference. He had shown Reeves a copy of the Communist Party newspaper the *Daily Worker* which had a photograph which looked remarkably like the young Mrs Hart, who was then the Labour candidate for Bournemouth West. Mr Reeves had said he did not think she had ever been to Warsaw.

The Special Branch officer asked the Labour alderman if he could make some discreet enquiries. But not wishing to be an undercover agent for the Secret Service in Bournemouth, Freddy Reeves had explained to Mrs Hart exactly what had happened. He also made it clear to the inspector again later that Judith Hart could not be the same Mrs Hart whose picture had appeared in the Communist newspaper.

In fact the blurred photograph was taken from the *Daily Worker* of 14 November 1950 and the caption below the photograph identified the young woman as Mrs Tudor Hart. But the clipping from the newspaper had remained on the file of Mrs Judith Hart for twenty-four years to be presented as documentary evidence when the matter was raised by MI5 in July of 1974.

Tudor Hart was a prominent member of the British Communist Party and his wife had also joined the Party but had left in 1956 after the Russians had suppressed the Hungarian uprising. When Penrose contacted her at her home in Fifeshire she told him that she now voted Conservative. Like Mrs Judith Hart she had been unaware that she was the subject of interest from members of the Security Services or that there could have been any confusion between herself and her Ministerial "double".

It was in 1948 that MI5 and the police Special Branch had compiled new lists of members of the Communist Party. The Cold War was entering its most chilly period, and the war in Korea was also at its height.

At the time enquiries were being made about the "wrong" Mrs Hart, the Minister-to-be who had never been a Communist, her husband was working as an Admiralty research scientist at Holton Heath near Parkstone in Dorset. No doubt this significant-looking coincidence aroused MI5's suspicions and made them think they were on to something.

Until Penrose called Mrs Hart she said she had not known why she had been considered a potential security risk in 1974. She had never dreamed that behind the muddle was the same confusion by MI5 which had also taken place in 1950. She wondered for a moment on the telephone whether this might explain why she had

never been invited to become a full member of the Cabinet in the past.

"I had been at Cabinet rank in 1968 and 69 as Paymaster-General," she said pensively, "But then I was sort of demoted and made Minister of Overseas Development – which I like. I don't think one can blame this on security stuff, but you don't know what damage it has done. You see, if it hadn't been for Freddy Reeves, who was such an essentially nice person, but dead now, we would never have known about all this. I wouldn't have known anything of this confusion."

The reporters were gaining a disturbing view of the realities behind the myth that Britain had an efficient Security Service with the Prime Minister of the day firmly in control. In addition to the tighter security that George Wigg had introduced in the Prime Minister's office to combat any foreign intelligence-gathering devices, the PM's staff also had to work on the assumption that they could not trust their own Security people.

"It was a sick atmosphere," said Lady Falkender. "After all, if you could not talk openly in the middle of Downing Street what hope was there?"

## Chapter 23

It seemed to the two reporters that Harold Wilson and his Ministers were within their rights to doubt the competence if not the loyalty of the Secret Service after cases like that of Mrs Hart. The atmosphere must indeed have been strained if Ministers felt that their careers could be jeopardised by such unfounded speculation which did not seem to die when matters had been resolved within the corridors of power. For her part, Lady Falkender, when the reporters had their long discussions with her, remained deeply suspicious about the Hart case and other enigmas connected with the long arm of Intelligence. She drew Penrose and Courtiour's attention to another type of Government decision which had been based on what many people had thought to be highly suspect Intelligence information. She cited the time when London's Heathrow Airport was occupied by the military and the police, once under the Conservatives and three times under Labour.

As she spoke, Courtiour and Penrose vividly called to mind those unfamiliar scenes three years before. It was a distinctly un-British picture which travellers had seen when they arrived at Heathrow on those occasions. Soldiers with sub-machine guns and armoured cars had patrolled the busy London airport and the surrounding parts of the city for days at a time, and in the middle of the State of Emergency and the crippling miners' strike, the scenes on television had added a fresh and, for some, sinister quality to the grim atmosphere in the country.

The official explanation announced by the Government in January 1974 was that "Intelligence sources" believed that Palestinian terrorists planned to attack jet airliners using shoulder-operated Sam-7 missiles. Journalists and cameramen, however, visited locations where such missiles could easily have been launched. And when they pointed their lenses at the glowing exhausts of the incoming aircraft to imitate the launching of that type of missile, there was often not a soldier in sight to prevent them. Even if the official explanation were correct, that the troops were an anti-terrorist precaution, the operation seemed strangely ineffective.

"All this business with troops on the airport road," Lady Falkender exclaimed. "That was to keep the airport road open in case of terrorist attack. But it was not clear if it was to allow people to get out or to get in. I remember then what happened, and Harold saying to me: 'Have you ever thought that all that could be used in a different way? They could be turned against the Government, totally.'"

Both reporters thought it strange that she should voice such apprehensions, a fear apparently shared by the former Labour Premier. For one thing, three of the joint military and police manoeuvres had taken place under the new 1974 Wilson administration: in June, July and September. The last exercise had taken place shortly before the October General Election. Only in June did the Home Office announce that the soldiers were on guard at Heathrow for a different purpose: to protect delegates arriving in Britain for the Socialist International Conference. But few of the delegates realised they were in any particular danger that summer or what the real danger was, and must have been startled at the wartime scene which greeted them on their arrival.

Courtior asked Lady Falkender why she appeared so concerned about the Heathrow exercises, and again she repeated her misgivings.

"I don't take it lightly although I used to take it lightly," she said seriously. "I remember Harold saying that the troops could be used in another way by turning them around . . . They could turn and get a situation, a very frightening situation where the alert itself could trigger off a plan for a coup. In fact now I come to think about it, it is extremely scary. It was very nasty to watch. It was like 1984. There was no protest."

The reporters felt that the idea of a military take-over in Britain even in a dire economic crisis seemed highly unlikely, patently absurd. In Greece, Chile or a country like Uganda, of course, military actions were always potential threats to whoever was in power. But surely not in modern Britain which had centuries of stable government behind it? It was scarcely possible to believe sometimes that they really were in the presence of powerful public figures who had helped govern the country for so many years.

What seemed confusing was that three of the Heathrow manoeuvres had, of course, taken place when Harold Wilson was Prime Minister. Courtior remembered that while the Conservatives were still in power Lord Wigg had asked in the House of

Lords whether the presence of such military force was not excessive and a Conservative spokesman for the Home Office, Lord Colville, had replied that the Government did not think so. But if Labour felt threatened by the manoeuvres, why had the Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins given the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, Sir Robert Mark, the Labour Government's authority to continue using troops and police at Heathrow? Surely he or the Prime Minister could have stopped the exercises if they had suspected they were simply camouflage for another purpose?

At the same time the reporters were aware that the Crown and the military had the traditional right to employ troops in, for example, a period of civil disorder. It seemed highly unlikely that a British monarch would ever use the Army in the twentieth century except in a situation where ordinary government had broken down. Was that perhaps a more likely thought behind the police and military exercises – that they were a sensible precaution against the possible breakdown of law and order?

Yet the reporters recalled that in July 1976 Sir Harold had mentioned that a new book – Hugh Cudlipp's *Walking on the Water* – was coming out later in the year which referred to the possibility that plans for a coup had actually existed, and indeed that an influential group of men were in an advanced state of readiness to carry out such a coup. At the time Penrose and Courtiour had taken comparatively little notice of the former Prime Minister's passing remark, but from what Lady Falkender had been saying neither she nor Sir Harold had been engaged in idle speculation.

In the aftermath of Labour's election victory in February, hastily formed volunteer organisations had sprung up in case, they had claimed, the miners' stoppage should turn into a General Strike. With perhaps the emotive memory of the 1926 Strike in mind, thousands of public-spirited citizens were offering their various skills freely to keep industry and the country going. In their view, government, and orderly society, was being challenged once again in 1974 and should be resisted. One solution they argued was to join what the Press were soon calling Britain's "private armies".

Such citizens watched the deteriorating national scene with expectant foreboding. Across the water in troubled Ulster the writing already seemed to be on the wall. The Northern Ireland Executive had resigned following a short but crippling

General Strike. Old soldiers like General Sir Walter Walker, until 1972 Commander-in-Chief of Nato's Northern Command in Europe, believed they had seen the blueprint of what would shortly follow in the British mainland.

Sir Walter, a crusading anti-Communist after years of facing the Russian border with Nato, formed his own citizens' "army", Civil Assistance, to meet the growing menace he and others saw about them.

"A new spirit is urgently needed in our country," Sir Walter said when the reporters visited him at his home in the Somerset village of South Petherton.

As a NATO Commander-in-Chief Sir Walter Walker had enjoyed the reputation of being a soldier with a taste for polemics. His campaigning zest to stiffen what he considered was Britain's sagging resolve had reached the *Times* in May 1973. At a time when the IRA had imposed its own form of martial law in Catholic areas of Londonderry in Ulster, the so-called No-Go areas, Sir Walter had no doubts what his solution would be in the circumstances. He wrote: "The Army should soften up the No-Go areas in Ulster and then move in. Cut off their petrol, gas, electricity and stop food going in. I have engaged in campaigns against blacks, yellows and slant-eyes – why should we have one rule for whites and one for coloureds?"

Just over a year later the General could claim he had a hundred thousand volunteers offering their help to his Civil Assistance movement. Support apparently poured in from all over Britain. It came he said from every class and from every age group. Ordinary citizens, retired and serving military personnel, police officers, including Special Branch and even ex-Intelligence men.

Civil Assistance was not the only private volunteer force to emerge in the summer crisis that year. Colonel David Stirling, who was best known for his SAS (Special Air Service) exploits during the war, planned his own tightly knit group of experts to assist the existing authorities. He told Penrose and Courtiour why he felt such a new force was necessary then.

"My concern sprang from discussions that I had with General Sir Michael [now Lord] Carver. Sir Michael was top dog at the Ministry of Defence at the time. In 1974 I knew that there were no plans prepared: no contingency plans for a national calamity like a General Strike."

Colonel Stirling explained that the military quite deliberately



did not have a contingency plan. Harold Wilson's Labour Government did not want the British Army to be used as a strike-breaking force in the event of a mass industrial stoppage. The Colonel wanted his group of trained cadres to take over essential public services, the gap left dangerously open he felt by the armed forces of the Crown.

However laudable some of the aims set out by the "private armies" may have appeared to the general public, they attracted immediate hostility from the trades unions. Their criticism was supported by Harold Wilson at 10 Downing Street and by other Cabinet Ministers. On 22 August 1974 Roy Mason, the Defence Secretary, attacked the citizen armies bitterly. Speaking from Transport House, Labour Party headquarters, the Minister said: "We are witnessing the reaction of frustrated Conservatives who have witnessed the failure of their leaders." This was now showing itself "in the near-fascist groundswell of Blimpish reaction" which sought to act as a catalyst "for all those extreme fascist and indeed Nazi-like factions to band together and overthrow our well-established Parliamentary, democratic procedures for a National Government."

Such intemperate language from a Cabinet Minister, particularly the Defence Secretary, had seemed exaggerated and unfair at the time. General Sir Walter Walker and Colonel David Stirling had both fought the Nazis with outstanding gallantry in the war. There was no suggestion that they had ever urged their followers to wear political uniforms or plot against the elected government. At the same time Roy Mason's remarks, in the light of what the reporters had heard from Harold Wilson and Lady Falkender, took on a somewhat new significance nearly three years later. What exactly was the danger to democracy which Labour Ministers detected in the private armies and the political Right?

Civil Assistance had certainly attracted political figures who were unashamedly pro-South African and sympathetic to the white settlers in Ian Smith's Rhodesia. Members of the Monday Club, for example, appeared to agree with Civil Assistance. This club had been started by young Tories in anger at Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's "wind of change" speech in February 1960. Indeed the Rhodesian Prime Minister had addressed the Club and received considerable and enthusiastic applause for his views.

The prominent Monday Clubber Geoffrey Rippon, then Shadow Foreign Secretary, only weeks before a General Election

in September 1974, urged the next Conservative Government to "create a citizens' voluntary reserve for home defence and duties in aid of the civil power".

Another leading Monday Clubber and "private army" supporter was George K. Young. He had occupied an important position in MI6 until the early 1960s when he had become a director of the London bankers, Kleinwort, Benson, and had turned to politics. He had become Chairman of the Monday Club's Action Fund and had spent money trying to attract new members. However, Young and his friends were criticised for letting National Front supporters into the Monday Club. Yet on some political issues, like the repatriation of coloured immigrants, he did not differ in his outlook from that of the National Front. He was concerned about the issue of immigration and was not frightened to say so in public.

Sir Harold had once remarked how notoriously extremist and right-wing the former civil servant was in his passionately held political views.

Courtiour recalled reading in news clippings about the link between Sir Walter Walker and Young. The Civil Assistance leader had addressed the Brent East Conservative Association in favour of Young who was standing as the Parliamentary candidate for the area. Like Walter Walker, he also had cordial links with the Anglo-Rhodesian Society. And he was very pro-South African: the President of a company called Nuclear Fuel Finance SA, he had promoted projects aimed at giving South Africa a nuclear capacity.

Walter Walker explained to Courtiour how he came to set up Civil Assistance and why he had not joined with the other groups in a grand alliance. "About a year after I retired," he told the reporters, "I had a letter from George K. Young whom I had never met." In the letter Young explained that General Walker's name had been given to him by Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templer. The Field-Marshal had declined to become involved with an organisation whose primary aim was said to be the security of the realm; he was too old but suggested that Young approach Walker to see if he might be interested.

Young had outlined to the General his plans for an Organisation which was to be called Unison, but Walker had finally decided in 1974 to start his own group because he felt that the nebulous and secretive nature of Young and the people about him was not the best way of tackling the problems that the country faced.

The Home Office and the Ministry of Defence had given instructions in 1974 that members of the Forces and civil servants should not join groups like Civil Assistance. General Walker claimed with some pride that although the directives had made things awkward he still had an extensive "intelligence" network. People in both Special Branch and the Secret Service had assured him that he could rely on them if it came to the crunch.

He stressed that his organisation was equally against dictatorship whether of the Right or the Left.

It was coming to the end of their meeting when the General said he would take the reporters into his confidence. Were they aware that the former Prime Minister Harold Wilson was a proven Communist? There was a Communist cell right there in the middle of Downing Street! He had heard about it from reliable sources, although he was not prepared for the time being to name them.

They had not mentioned to the General, of course, their special connection with Sir Harold or that they had already heard the rumours about a "Communist cell".

Sir Walter went on to say that he had seen filmed interviews with Harold Wilson on his return from official visits to the Soviet Union. The Labour Premier had been visibly shaking, and Sir Walter felt that was a clear indication that Harold Wilson had been compromised in some way by the KGB.

At their first meeting Courtiour gently raised the question of finance: Civil Assistance needed money: where had it come from? The reporters mentioned South Africa and Rhodesia, asking if contributions had ever been channelled from supporters in those countries. All the General was prepared to say was that about £6,000 had come in public subscriptions in 1974 and this had been supplemented by cash donations from various companies. He mentioned that one of "the biggest landowners in Eastern England" and the chairman of a television company and a building society were among CA's biggest supporters and benefactors but they were afraid to come into the open he said. One firm had sent £10,000 in 1974, but this had dropped to £5,000 the following year.

Penrose asked Sir Walter why "Lieutenant-Colonel" Frederick Cheeseman had been listed in the Ashford Corporation's official directory as one of his area coordinators. The General said he was unaware of the fact and at first said he had never heard of Cheeseman. He promised to look into the matter immediately.

Infiltrators had on occasion penetrated Civil Assistance, even Communists and homosexuals.

He could illustrate, he said, what he meant by people who tried to infiltrate his movement. Somebody in 1974 had anonymously sent him a handwritten manuscript which talked about a relationship between the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe and a man called Scott. All kinds of people came to him with all sorts of tales. He wanted no part of it. He had passed the manuscript on to someone on his staff for safekeeping.

It was curious how the Scott story should reappear like this in quite independent parts of their whole enquiry. What the Liberal leader had once called "wild allegations" had reached through the three major political Parties to Intelligence agencies around the world and back again to strange phenomena like the "private armies". The reporters wondered who else might have seen the handwritten Scott manuscript at Sir Walter's Civil Assistance headquarters? Even without his permission being given, it could have been seen by National Front supporters, disgruntled Special Branch men; perhaps even the ex-MI6 protagonist George K. Young. After all, someone had taken the trouble to photocopy it and send it "anonymously" to the former Nato Commander-in-Chief, Northern Command.

The reporters were soon to discover that another copy of the manuscript was circulating in the West Country. It too could have played a not insignificant part in the run-up to the October 1974 Election.

The danger that the manuscript represented that year for a growing number of political figures, including the leaders of all three major political parties in Britain, had very little to do with the accuracy or otherwise of the allegations the script contained. For the politically motivated groups into whose hands the manuscript fell, the most interesting question was how such allegations had failed to become public for so many years.

One man who had been aware of the political implications of Norman Scott's allegations was Dr Ronald Gleadle. He had turned some of Scott's papers into hard cash though not for himself before the first Election of 1974. And the Rowleys in North Molton were not at all sure that Ronald Gleadle's actions had been of benefit to their friend Norman's health.

He was drinking heavily and with the money he had been given was able to afford a bottle of whisky a day. So Kennard Rowley

was determined to help Scott in some way and to find out what lay behind the puzzling gift of £2,500. By sheer coincidence he had chosen an astonishingly apposite time to satisfy his curiosity.

"I was reading the *North Devon Journal* in the spring of 1974," he said, "and noticed an article about a local author named Ronald Duncan who had written the film script for Marianne Faithfull's *Girl on a Motorbike*. The man was criticising Jeremy Thorpe, so I decided to call him and tell him about Norman's case."

Ronald Duncan had spoken at several public meetings on behalf of the Conservative candidate, Tim Keigwin.

"Rowley called me twice, I remember," Duncan told the two reporters.

"The first time I told him I was not interested in a man's private life. When he called later and told me Scott was being persecuted, and money was involved, I decided to take an interest."

Not long afterwards Duncan went with his private secretary, Miranda Weston-Smith, to see Scott at his cottage on Exmoor. The writer was sceptical about the story, but he saw bank accounts showing that £2,500 had been paid into them. Perhaps Scott was telling the truth part of the time, Duncan thought, and took Scott to his lawyers, to repeat his story to them.

"I had no political interest in the matter," he told Penrose and Courtiour. "It never crossed my mind that this would do anything to discredit the Liberal Party."

Nevertheless he had taken the Scott affair most seriously, and he then went to see the *Sunday Times*. The newspaper, which was later to publish Thorpe's denials, showed no apparent interest in the story. He also said he contacted a Devon reporter who wrote for the *Daily Mail*, but nothing came of this either. It seemed that all his efforts were destined to peter out.

Nevertheless, a game of Russian roulette was now being played behind the scenes in British politics. As each successive chamber failed to fire, the wheel was given another spin, and it was obvious to any gambling man that sooner or later the whole affair would blow up.

On 13 June 1976, in one of their regular trans-Atlantic exchanges, Penrose had asked Peter Bessell if he had heard a rumour about some papers which had gone missing from his house in Cornwall. They included confidential letters and the reporter had been told that builders had found them six years earlier.

"What happened I think was this," Bessell replied. "When my

office was closed down in 1974 it's possible that a decorator stole a briefcase. A number of letters, including the original letter Scott had written to Mrs Thorpe, Jeremy's mother, I had put in a briefcase back in the 1960s. I told my secretary it must be transferred to a safe. It wasn't done. The first I heard of it was a year ago when Jeremy passed a message through Diane to me that the papers had been returned to him."

Penrose could hardly believe his ears. How could Bessell leave vital papers around his office in Pall Mall? It struck the reporter as the height of folly to take such unnecessary risks after what had happened in the past. Not surprisingly, in the peculiar circumstances the reporter wondered what the chain of events had been when the papers were discovered. Bessell said the letters had been returned to Thorpe by the *Mirror* newspaper.

Penrose first called Edward Pickering, the Mirror Group's Chairman, and asked if he knew about a cache of sensitive letters which had fallen into their hands back in 1974. Pickering confirmed Bessell's basic story. As far as he remembered, the letters had originally gone to the *Sunday Mirror*'s Editor, Robert Edwards.

"I wasn't Chairman at that time," he added. "That would have been Sydney Jacobson. He took the decision to return the letters to Jeremy Thorpe."

Penrose asked Pickering if ordinary *Mirror* reporters had been made aware of those letters when they were working on the Thorpe-Scott story back at the beginning of 1976. Again the Mirror Group's Chairman seemed surprised at the question.

"Oh no," he said finally, seemingly aghast at such an idea. "I'd like to say that I've never read those letters myself."

"So you've still got them?"

"Our legal department kept copies: you'd better speak to our lawyer Patrick Easton."

Patrick Easton was the legal adviser at the Mirror Group up until his sudden death just a few weeks later. When he came on the line that day he sounded irritated that his Chairman had spoken so candidly about such a delicate matter. Reluctantly the *Mirror*'s legal manager agreed that he had taken photocopies of the letters.

"For legal reasons you'll understand," he was at pains to point out. "And I would emphasise that I didn't read them myself."

Courtiour spoke to Lord Jacobson, who had been created a life peer in the July 1975 Honours List, and asked him if he had taken the decision to send the papers back to the Liberal leader. The Labour peer confirmed he knew about the affair, but he did not wish to discuss it. Nevertheless he did not want to argue with his successor Sir Edward Pickering.

Penrose now decided to try and track down the decorators who, Bessell said, had found the letters in his Pall Mall offices. He contacted Patrick Bos, whose firm were agents for the building and Bos gave him the Essex address of the Johnson brothers, the decorators.

Tony Johnson was frank about what he and five other decorators had discovered at Pall Mall. He sounded faintly nervous on the phone, not so much because of the call as because of the contents of the letters.

"Phew! That was a day," he said. "They were hidden behind a secret compartment in a cupboard. I remember my brother Donald spent eight hours reading the letters and looking at the photographs."

"What did the letters contain?"

"You see, there were six of us working at Pall Mall. We found this case. Inside was a packet with 'The property of Mr Jeremy Thorpe' written on it.

"There were about sixty letters I should say, photographs and some financial papers."

"What kind of letters and photographs?" the reporter asked.

"Some of them were rude. One was written in Dublin by that fellow who made all that fuss in the papers: Norman Scott, that's him. Phew!"

Johnson claimed that the letters had been written over a period of about twelve years.

Penrose asked about the photographs they had seen.

"Oh they were rude photographs. To us, ordinary working men you understand, it looked like a blackmail dossier against Mr Thorpe."

Johnson said he and his workmates had wanted advice on what to do with the package. Rather than contact the police, they had approached the *Sunday Mirror*. The paper had immediately sent round two staff reporters to examine what the decorators had found at 41 Pall Mall.

Jean Carr and the paper's motoring correspondent, Roy Spicer

took the package marked "The property of Mr Jeremy Thorpe" back to the *Sunday Mirror*, leaving the Johnson brothers with a receipt.

Later Jean Carr learned that the *Sunday Mirror* would return the material to the Liberal leader at the House of Commons. In a sense it was "stolen property".

But before the paper's Editor, Robert Edwards, passed them to Jeremy Thorpe personally at Westminster, accompanied by the lawyer Patrick Easton, everything had been photocopied and lodged in the legal department's security safe. In future there could be no dispute about what had, or had not, been returned to the politician.

When Jean Carr discussed with Courtiour what had happened she said: "I was sworn to secrecy by my Editor and by our lawyer, who went to see the person concerned." She placed the time of the paper's discovery in the first week of November 1974 just after the general election.

Courtiour arranged to meet the Johnson brothers in Loughton in Essex. When he arrived for the appointment, a short stocky man in his early thirties, carrying a large golfer's umbrella by his side, was standing outside Tony Johnson's house. The reporter thought it odd that the umbrella should be held by the man's side: it was beginning to rain. The man turned out to be Tony Johnson. He appeared hesitant, nervous, even frightened, but he invited the reporter inside.

Once in the house he asked Courtiour for some form of identification and was more relaxed. The reporter reached for his provisional driving licence and showed it to the decorator.

"Okay, Donald, you can come down now!" he shouted out loudly. "I had my brother upstairs with an air gun in case you were a hit man," he explained, nodding in the direction of a younger man who suddenly appeared.

"Well, I will tell you one of the things that was in the letters," he said, speaking quickly. "There was a break-in at the Liberal Party and they reckoned it was by the South Africans. We thought you might be them South Africans."

The brothers explained that from the moment Courtiour appeared a high velocity air rifle had been trained on him from upstairs. Tony Johnson admitted he had been holding an air pistol inside the half-folded umbrella he had been carrying.

They said they had found the Thorpe papers in November 1974.

Donald Johnson had taken them home at the time and made notes of what they contained.

According to their account, there were personal letters from Norman Scott to Jeremy Thorpe and from Thorpe to Scott. They remembered too a letter from Northern Ireland which said that Scott was mad. A private detective had been hired to look for Scott and to report back to lawyers what he discovered. Courtiour recalled Ian Withers telling them about the agency which had landed that job.

"If we had gone to a foreign newspaper we could have got £15,000 for them," one brother said. "What we had would have wrecked the Liberal Party. In fact, it had to be kept quiet not only because of the personal papers but also because of Official Secrets."

The brothers were adamant that everything they had said was true, and a few weeks later both men swore affidavits about the events and the nature of their 1974 find.

When Penrose called Robert Edwards at the *Sunday Mirror*, he did not deny that he had seen the Thorpe papers or that he had returned them to the politician at the House of Commons.

"I hear you've been talking to members of my staff," he said. "Look I can't talk about the letters; I'd be breaking the oath of secrecy I imposed on my staff."

Edwards had already made his own paper's position about the Norman Scott affair clear in an editorial he himself had written on Sunday 16 May 1976, six days after Jeremy Thorpe had resigned from the Liberal leadership.

The Editor had started his article: "Has there been a more squalid episode, in recent times, than the slaughter in the Palace of Westminster of Mr Jeremy Thorpe?" He went on to say that Thorpe had continued rigorously to deny the accusations about an alleged homosexual relationship with Scott. He added: "no evidence has been produced that would stand up in a court of law . . . But the maxim of innocent until proved guilty has been thrown aside in Mr Thorpe's case. And it was his former friend [Scott] who pulled the trigger."

Edwards continued: "After he heard the news of Mr Thorpe's resignation, Mr Scott told reporters that he was so upset he had been sick. It is all decent people in Britain who are sick, Mr Scott. Sick at your behaviour. Ugh!"

Courtior and Penrose were surprised at the strong stand which

the *Sunday Mirror*'s Editor had taken at the time. Whatever Robert Edwards might have thought of Scott personally, the letters seen by him and his staff suggested that the full story had not been made public. In the cache of correspondence were letters, of course, which showed beyond reasonable doubt that there had been an affectionate relationship between the two men.

Ironically the *Sunday Mirror*'s sister paper, the *Daily Mirror*, had taken an altogether different approach to the Liberal Party story. It had sent reporters all over the world in its efforts to find out who was telling the truth. Their Executive Editor, Dan Ferrari, had sent men to chase leads in America, South Africa, Holland and all around Britain. One reporter, John Penrose – no relation of Barrie Penrose – had spent several months in North Devon, working almost solely on the emerging Scott saga. He had produced a series of exclusive stories in the early months of 1976 until the newspaper decided to make him their Rome-based correspondent.

Dan Ferrari and his team only learned later about the collection of letters which the Mirror Group kept in its legal department's safe. Reporters were "surprised and bewildered" when they heard that vital new information had been sitting in an office directly above their heads all the time.

Ferrari, an experienced journalist who had long suspected there were far greater political implications involved in the Thorpe-Scott affair, raised the matter with the *Daily Mirror*'s top management. He was told that the management did not acknowledge that any such letters existed. However, if they did exist they would not be "made available" to the *Daily Mirror*. They would be the exclusive property of the *Sunday Mirror*.

In the meantime Norman Scott had heard about the letters kept in the Mirror Group's legal department. Some of them belonged to him, he argued. He had a legal right to them, he believed. The Johnson brothers had remembered the text of some of the letters. When Penrose read out the beginning of a sentence, Scott was unfailingly able to complete it accurately.

"Those were the letters which I had kept in my suitcase in Switzerland," he said. "They were subsequently to disappear in London if you remember."

In September 1976 Norman Scott wrote to the Mirror Group asking for photocopies of his correspondence to be returned to him. On 14 October Edward Pickering replied: "The collection of

letters to which you refer has never been in my possession, nor have I ever looked at them. They were brought to the Editor of the *Sunday Mirror* and I have therefore passed on your letter to him<sup>1</sup> . . . as far as I am aware there is nothing in the possession of either the *Sunday Mirror*, or our Legal Department, that belongs to you."

Robert Edwards replied to Scott in much the same vein; on 15 October 1976: "The collection of papers to which you refer were brought to the *Sunday Mirror* and, as you state in your letter, were subsequently handed over to Mr Jeremy Thorpe MP. I am advised that there is nothing in the possession either of the *Sunday Mirror* or our Legal Department that belongs to you."

The reporters thought the Mirror Group's stand quite remarkable. It was perhaps the supreme irony that the *Daily Mirror*, which had courageously backed Scott in his efforts to get back letters which had been in the possession of Scotland Yard for fourteen years, should now find itself in such an invidious position. It was quite apparent that once again journalists had not been allowed to do their job. Ferrari and his team feared that one day people might believe they had contributed to some kind of cover-up themselves when of course, the opposite was the case.

The newspaper group which had urged and helped Scott issue a summons against Scotland Yard in the spring of 1976 now found itself the target for a legal summons. Norman Scott had written to the Mirror Group's legal department threatening them with a summons if they did not immediately return his correspondence.

For the two ex-BBC men the Pall Mall letters had another significance apart from the odd behaviour of the Mirror Group. They showed that between the two elections of 1974 a political time-bomb had been ticking away slowly at Bessell's old offices. Patrick Bos later told Courtiour that from the time he knew that the former MP had disappeared for good, anybody could have stumbled across the attaché case which had been curiously left behind there.

"We actually got into those offices in the summer, I think," said Bos. "I got a locksmith to pick the lock."

He went on to add that the cupboard where the papers had been found by the Johnson brothers was in an inaccessible place. It needed a ladder to reach into it.

In view of incidents like these, and the unanswered questions they wanted to raise with Bessell, the reporters decided to visit him

in California. For one thing the former Member of Parliament would surely understand how dangerous he had proved to be for the friend he claimed he was helping. Or was there perhaps a more sinister motive for what had been left behind at 41 Pall Mall? Had the letters which he had kept in the hidden cupboard there been meant to influence the outcome of the October 1974 Election? For there was little doubt that if the attaché case had come to light *before* the Election, rather than just afterwards, the outcome at the polls might have been very different indeed. In the event, Harold Wilson had won the Election but he would need to rely increasingly on the Liberals at Westminster to remain comfortably in office. Altogether Penrose and Courtiour felt that Peter Bessell had a great deal of explaining to do.

## Chapter 24

During the eleven-hour flight to Los Angeles Courtiour and Penrose nervously recapped what they knew of Bessell from the transcripts and news clippings they had accumulated. The newspapers had been very uncomplimentary about him in general. He was portrayed as a discredited politician and a disastrous businessman: a proven liar who had ultimately betrayed his closest friend and former Party leader. But exactly why he had apparently lied on so many occasions the reporters were not at all sure. He did not seem to have done it in order to advance his own career or line his own pocket.

The *Sunday Times* had suggested that his lies were mixed together with blackmail, insolvency and Norman Scott. The "Insight" team bit deep into Bessell's already sagging reputation when, on 14 March 1976, they said that "the first central matter in what has become the ordeal of Jeremy Thorpe is that Bessell paid money to Scott – very possibly in order to suppress information about his own business operations, not about anybody's sexual peccadilloes."

If Bessell had something to hide about his money affairs he must, the article strongly implied, be somewhat disreputable in the first place. He had also, it was stated, given up his Parliamentary seat in 1968.

"Bessell's payments to Scott," the article went on, "ceased in 1969, when he shifted his base of operations to New York. In 1971 Bessell vanished from his New York apartment, and his English company collapsed, leaving debts of £75,000 and assets of about £200."

But a great deal of what the *Sunday Times* had printed was simply not accurate: "I did not give up my seat in 1968," Bessell had written to the two reporters. "Until May 1970 I was an active and garrulous Member of Parliament."

According to Bessell, he had also not disappeared from New York in 1971. Indeed he said that it was in 1971 that he had actually opened his New York office which he ran in conjunction

with his London office in Pall Mall. And he also claimed that in 1971 he did not have a New York apartment from which to vanish. His New York home was not rented until later.

Bessell readily agreed however that he had disappeared from the scene in early 1974.

About the fall of his company, Bessell was at pains to point out that it was not true that in 1971 his "English company collapsed leaving debts of £75,000". He contended that "the published liabilities were approximately £45,000. On re-assessment these were reduced to about £22,000. Of that amount partial settlements have been made with regard to about £14,000. When negotiations to agree tax assessments have been concluded, the balance of totally unclassified claims is likely to be a little over £3,000."

Bessell claimed simply that his companies had floundered because of the severe credit squeeze of 1972–4 and the combination of this with a redevelopment project he had been involved with in the Bronxville suburb of New York.

Peter Bessell had managed to settle matters with most of his creditors after his severe financial problems. But on 6 August 1977 he learned that the Liberal peer, Lord Beaumont of Whitley, had started an action in the High Court to recover the sum of £23,342, which he said was owed to him by the former MP. The money had been borrowed from Timothy Beaumont in the mid-1960s.

If the *Sunday Times* team had been inaccurate at times in matters of fact, they were not altogether wrong in their critical attitude towards the man. Bessell had lied, and lied repeatedly. It was arguable that he had lied wholly to protect the politician he loved and the party he cared for deeply. But his behaviour might also be seen as the lamentable last act of a discredited figure.

On the telephone from California he had admitted candidly that he had attempted to compromise and influence politicians in order to protect his leader and their Party. And that he had often succeeded in his aims. His cover-up schemes and lies were, he firmly believed at the time, for the general good, and not for his own well-being.

When Courtiour and Penrose checked out his facts and versions of events, former Home Secretaries like Sir Frank Soskice and Reginald Maudling had confirmed certain points which Bessell had disclosed. Other politicians like Alice Bacon, Emlyn Hooson, David Steel and Richard Wainwright had done the same. But when other people confirmed that a man was telling the truth when

he said he had done something deplorable, did that make the man any less to blame?

It was a disarming fact that often in the leads he gave to the reporters he did not reveal himself in a very flattering light. But were the stories he gave to them the "ungarnished truth as he knew it" as he argued on the phone. And why was he saying that he believed the whole story should be told, when the whole story, as far as Penrose and Courtiour could see, reflected very badly on him?

Bessell came to meet them at Los Angeles airport: he looked younger than his 56 years. He was thin, even gaunt in appearance, his narrow lined face tanned to bronze from the year-round California sun.

The reporters were exhausted from the flight. So Bessell drove them straight to a motel on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard. He said he stayed there regularly when he had to be in Los Angeles.

"If you want to call me I'm one balcony up," he said casually. "Ask for room 104; don't ask for me by name."

Bessell inexplicably used the name Dr Paul Hoffman at the motel.

Next morning Penrose and Courtiour looked out from the motel at their personal view of Hollywood. They found they were staying at the down-at-heel end of the Sunset Strip. Opposite was Jackie's, an "Oriental Garden Bar", and a strange shop called "Thimblereg Research: specialising in Man-powered Flights, Solar Power Generation and Edible Urinal Cakes". What sort of a world was this for an ex-British Member of Parliament?

But that was only the first of their shocks. The next thing to strike them was that Bessell called at their room and left each of them identical typewritten letters to read. He wanted them signed. Everything that had been said on the phone in the past, and in correspondence, was to be considered strictly confidential. Nothing could be published without his permission. That was the deal, he said. Then they could talk.

For Penrose and Courtiour this was little short of a disaster. It looked very much as if they had come all the way from England for nothing, because as with the BBC they were not prepared to sign a document which might eventually muzzle them. They did not wish to upset Peter Bessell, but there was no way that they could agree to the proposal outlined in his letter.

With only limited expectations now, they drove along the

freeway to Bessell's home in Oceanside. He seemed more relaxed than they had expected after the events earlier in the year. Passing ex-President Nixon's estate at San Clemente, Bessell said he loved America and would never return to live in England. He suffered from trouble with his heart and lungs and he smoked too much. If it were not for the sun which shone the whole year round on the West Coast he might well have died already. His doctor said at one moment he only had a little time left.

At the height of the Press furore in February 1976, he said, the barrage from the Press had made him ill and Diane Kelly, his American wife-to-be, had finally refused to let reporters meet him. Now that the rumpus about the Thorpe affair had largely died down, he wanted to finish some children's stories he had begun writing for an American publisher. Did they know that his mother was the originator of the strip cartoon Rupert Bear?

Courtior and Penrose both shook their heads, rather non-plussed for a moment.

Oceanside when they arrived was a nondescript sort of place, sprawled along the edge of the Pacific Ocean. If Bessell and his girlfriend were seeking anonymity, this place certainly seemed to have the right qualifications.

Despite the wide beach and foaming surf which crashed down unceasingly onto the sands, there was nothing grand about the setting Bessell had retreated into. Before they left London Sir Harold Wilson had said he imagined the former Liberal might be living in luxury, his income supplemented by the South Africans. But if Bessell did possess a private income he certainly disguised it well. His cottage was tiny and makeshift and he obviously had a frugal life-style.

The trappings of the single living-room still proclaimed Bessell's Englishness. At the far end was a coloured print of the interior of the House of Commons. Bessell had been married twice, and there were family snapshots on the wall. Near by were pictures of his favourite politicians from the past: President Teddy Roosevelt and Prime Minister Lloyd George. There was also an oil painting of an English foxhunting scene.

Bessell's girlfriend, Diane Kelly, was tall with long fairish flowing hair, a shy becoming smile. She and Bessell shared their cottage with three dachshunds. The couple appeared contented together, although Diane had clearly found the recent Press onslaught a traumatic experience.



That first evening was a difficult occasion. Bessell and Diane were pleased by the reporters' gift of a Fortnum & Mason hamper – it was a simple courtesy which few of the other<sup>1</sup> journalists, faced with deadlines and so on, had had time for – but there was nevertheless an underlying tension. The two journalists had made it clear that they would not sign Bessell's piece of paper and it was apparent that he resented this.

However, before Bessell drove them back to their motel, it was agreed that they would spend the following day with him going through the documents which the reporters had accumulated, and the ex-MP would authenticate those which were attributed to him.

The following morning they settled down once more in the small beachside cottage. Bessell first asked them about the tapes to which the *News of the World* had referred in a front-page article on 26 September 1976. The article had clearly been based on his revelations over the phone to Penrose, and the reporters had been at some pains to convince Bessell that the leak was not their responsibility. The former MP explained that Ronald Maxwell had seemed very well-informed when he had visited him shortly before the piece went out. Courtiour and Penrose said that they did not know exactly how the information had leaked from the BBC. But what they could do was to let him read the transcript of the phone conversation between himself and Penrose that had caused all the trouble.

Bessell read slowly through the document and Penrose wondered if he was as startled now to see his revelations down in black and white as the reporter had first been when he heard them over the telephone. The transcript plunged straight away into his description of discussions that had taken place in England between himself and two other men about a drastic and final solution to the Scott problem.

The men whom Bessell described as the prime movers in these discussions had, he said, "the bright idea that the best place to get rid of Scott would be in America. And knowing at that time that I was over here more or less all the time – they took the line – 'Well come on, Peter, surely you can get the job done in America. We can get him over there.'"

The suggestion was, he said, that a man could go over in 1971 to America and then – as Bessell put it – "deal with him".

Bessell claimed that he and the Liberal Party supporter had then entered into a game of charades, to give the impression that he was

actually proceeding with the suggestion for handling the problem of Norman Scott.

"I forgot about it," said Bessell. "It was all garbage. You have to get visas to get people into America." But the reporters knew that he had actually written to Scott at one point, telling him about the efforts he was making to obtain an American visa for him.

The next thing that had happened, according to Bessell's account, was that the man had shown up in America and called to say that he had come over to see him about the plan. The two of them had apparently agreed to "put on a show". "In other words to say all right, we'll pretend it's possible to get a hit man and pretend it is possible to get Scott over here into Florida. There he can be picked off in the Everglades.

"I know it sounds like a fairy story but this is what happened. The man said to me, and I agreed with him, this is probably the best way to get over this nonsense. The visitor's line was not that he cared very much about whether Scott lived or died, he did care a great deal that he should not be involved in anything like that that might result in Scott dying.

"So I said: 'Well all right, we'll put up some kind of a show. You go back and say it can't be done. You can't find a hit man, you can't find a gun. In any case we couldn't get Norman Scott over here.

"The man went off to Patterson, New Jersey, to several places in that area, to stand up in bars to find himself somebody who would put him in touch with a hit man. And after a few days he reported to me that he had no success. I said: 'It's no use reporting that you have been unsuccessful.'

"He said no, he'd already reported that he was 'going to do the job himself'. Now he was going to get a gun.

"To cut a very long story short, about two weeks later, I met him in Fort Lauderdale in Florida, and he'd got himself a gun, I don't know how much you know about weapons, but this was the kind of little pellet shotgun you would choose, not to shoot rabbits, but clay pigeons at short range. It wouldn't have pierced anything.

"This will do. Scott is perfectly safe in Britain."

"He [Scott] hadn't got a visa: I don't even think he had a passport at that time. And the whole thing was enacted. The man went back to England and said, you know, nothing happened."

At this point in the telephone conversation Penrose had inter-

rupted in order to try and establish the timing of these astounding "charades".

"When was this?" he asked the former MP.

And Bessell had replied without hesitation: "January 1971."

"These are the sort of things," he went on, "which are so astonishing. It's absolutely important I say a little more on this: not on this particular episode but on the general thing. The idea to kill Norman Scott was conceived somewhere about 1966 to 1967. The first time I heard about it was one evening when the conversation came round to this. And I said: 'Yes, yes, yes.' I don't know where I was going, to the House to vote or something; I remember getting into my car and driving away and thinking to myself: 'Good God, he meant it.'

"I turned round and went back and said: 'You're serious, aren't you?'"

"And he said: 'Oh yes, of course, it's the only way, it's the only solution.'

"I had to reach a very difficult decision: What do I do? If I say: 'Put this whole idea out of your mind, it's crazy, it's the most irresponsible thing I've ever heard . . . how can you talk like this? What are you talking about?' the effect is going to be that the man just simply will never talk to me about it again. In other words, that will be the end of it as far as Peter is concerned. Peter is not the person to talk to. If on the other hand I play along with him and say: 'Well, maybe you're right, perhaps this is the right way,' at least I'll know what is going on . . . I will know what is going to happen. If something crazy should happen I could frustrate it.

"The decision I took was to let him go along with it. Well I would say: 'Well, yes, it is very difficult . . .' He would come up with some different scheme, one of his favourite schemes was one had to find a site where a new road was being built, because he'd read somewhere that one of the simplest ways to get rid of a body was to put the body in cement and dump it in a place where the cement machine was coming along the next day, and cover it over. Well, that would be fine in a novel but this doesn't make sense when you work it out. That is the sort of way his thinking was going . . . I would listen to those stories: - 'Very good idea!' - 'Great possibilities!' Having got it off his chest . . . he would seem to forget it."

"He never thought possibly of doing it himself?" asked Penrose.

"Oh, no, never. This is always something that made me quite angry. One has to look at the psychology of the man . . .

There was a silence when Bessell finished reading the transcript and Courtiour quickly suggested that they should go through the other documents for him to verify them. The reporter was keen to do this because he wished to impress upon the former MP exactly how much information they already had. Indeed it was possible that in some areas they knew more than he did, and it was important, Courtiour felt, to get that point over. And they settled down with the documents, each one of which Bessell initialled and dated, giving them an invaluable provenance.

Afterwards Bessell offered to read them sections from an *aide-mémoire* more than a hundred pages long which he had just finished writing. For three weeks he had sketched out everything he could remember about the Thorpe-Scott story, and Diane had almost completed re-typing it for him. He intended depositing it with his solicitors in case anything should happen to him. But Diane was astonished that he should even mention the manuscript in the first place; horrified that he should actually want to divulge its contents to them.

"Why read it?" she asked Bessell, following her shrill question by staring hard at him.

Turning to the two reporters she explained why she was so adamantly against their knowing the contents of the *aide-mémoire*. Frankly it was an explosive document.

"No offence," she exclaimed, gesturing with her hands, "but I've had it up to here." She reminded Peter that they had agreed that nobody would see it until their lawyers had read it in London. Bessell smiled indulgently.

Diane spoke angrily: "I've had it all along. I stick by my decision. It's not finished. Peter's got a credibility problem - every time he opens his mouth."

Bessell interrupted pleasantly, saying that reading from his *aide-mémoire* could prove useful in checking over certain facts. He wanted to test how good his memory was.

Over the following four days the three men talked through the mornings, afternoons and evenings. They exchanged documents and exchanged theories, checked papers and argued. Bessell went through his *aide-mémoire*, extensively revealing new facets of the story, many of which fitted exactly the information they had already obtained from others.

But a feature of Bessell's accounts of the events that had taken place in the past was the same puzzling element. He appeared to incriminate himself over and over again if what he said was true<sup>2</sup>. What made him so absolutely sure that he was not risking arrest and extradition from America to Britain, to stand trial perhaps at the Old Bailey?

"To put me on trial for conspiracy [to murder], they would have to get an extradition order. I will tell you one thing which is odd about British and American justice. To get an extradition order they would first have to put me on trial in the United States . . . We are not talking about some kangaroo court in Los Angeles, say for traffic offences. The case would be heard in a Federal court before a top judge."

In any case he maintained that he was innocent of any indictable offence, and being taken to Britain by Scotland Yard officers was extremely remote. At most they might want him as a witness: that was a distinct possibility.

"If I have any fear at all," he said quietly, "it's that I might be bumped off here in California."

"Because you know too much?" Penrose asked.

"I don't know the going rate for murdering people over here," he replied calmly, "But it's probably a \$2,000 deal. We're not living in England, you see."

The next day Bessell described another unknown part of his life at Westminster years before. He disclosed a disturbing collection of plans, events and conversations he claimed he had witnessed and taken part in, expanding and adding to those he had recounted over the telephone.

According to Peter Bessell, some of the murder schemes – or charades – had been hatched in London. Shooting Scott, even poisoning him and throwing his body down a mineshaft, had been contemplated in endless discussions in the capital city.

Bessell was painting an altogether new picture of the story, a picture no longer only of political intrigue, blackmail, double-dealing, homosexuality and foreign conspiracies, but of plans for an old-fashioned English murder. If he was to be believed, some supporters of the Liberal Party in Britain believed that Scott represented such a danger that he had to be eliminated. One Liberal, he said, had pointed out rather light-heartedly that it would take a couple of strong men to dig a six-foot grave. The model was a big man and tall. Unless it was done properly the body

was likely to be found. Another suggestion was that Scott's dead body could be weighted and dropped into a river. But Bessell said he himself had pointed out: "It would be hard to find a deep-water river that was not surrounded by wharfs, factories, or houses."

Behind locked doors a person had apparently once said he favoured using a tin-mine in Cornwall to dispose of the body. The man was said to have been so excited with the idea that he had grabbed Bessell by the shoulders and shouted: "Christ! I've got it, I've got it, I've got it!" The ex-MP explained that this idea had innocently sprung from some remarks he had made at Westminster:

"I once talked about disused tin-mines in Cornwall and the danger they represented to children or unwary tourists, and had illustrated what I meant by recounting how I had thrown pebbles down a mine-shaft and waited to hear the faint plop when they reached the water at the bottom hundreds of feet below."

Bessell immediately conceded that at first he had dismissed the conversations he heard as fanciful, comic, at worst wishful thinking. But not everybody agreed with him, he said. If they were charades, they were not regarded as such by others who had been present.

Why had he not reported what he had heard if he thought people were seriously planning to murder Scott, asked Courtiour.

"I had no evidence of such conversations," he said. "They would have been denied if I'd gone to the police or even the Party . . . In retrospect," he conceded though, "I'm not at all sure I should have adopted the attitude I did at the time."

Bessell had alleged unequivocally that several people had been involved in the discussions. Once, he said, the Liberal supporter he had earlier referred to on the telephone had arrived at the Commons to discuss the murder. He had been tense and apparently against becoming involved in killing the luckless model.

"When I asked what weapon would be used to kill Scott," Bessell continued, "I was told: a revolver. The plan was to lure Scott to St Austell in Cornwall and then get him drunk." He could then, he added sombrely, be shot dead at a convenient spot on Bodmin Moor, a remote part of the West of England.

Bessell went on reading from his notes, in the quiet domestic atmosphere which, apart from the impact of his words, would have been soporific. He claimed that the Liberal Party supporter had agreed to adopt a false identity and drive away with Scott and kill him. But because guns were noisy they had discussed using poison.

Someone had observed with humour that it would look odd "if Scott fell off the bar-stool stone dead!" Bessell, in a similar vein, had apparently replied that it would be all right – they could ask the landlord if he knew of a handy mine-shaft! Recalling the occasion he said: "It was nerves I suppose, but I started to laugh uncontrollably."

One man in the room had not been amused by the laughter. He had suggested that there must be a slow-working poison and it was probably only a matter of researching and discovering its name. One of the group had been detailed to do this research into the problems involved.

Bessell then claimed that he and others actively tried to dissuade them from going ahead with killing Scott. Putting down his *aide-mémoire*, he turned to Penrose and Courtiour and said persuasively: "If you look at this whole thing from outside objectively, have you ever heard of a more bungled, stupid, idiotic childish scheme? I mean, any writer of any penny dreadful can produce a better story than this. And what kind of brain is it that thinks in these terms . . . this notion which is born of *Boys' Own Paper* 1922?"

If the reporters were having difficulty in deciding how much of Bessell's story was fabrication and how much long-concealed truth, it became clear that he too was having difficulty in deciding what their role was in the affair. Shortly before they were due to leave Oceanside for Washington DC, he asked them if it was true that they had been having meetings with Sir Harold Wilson. They felt able to confirm the fact which had become public after they left the BBC.

Bessell shook his head in amazement and then for the first time revealed some of the complex thoughts that occupied the calculatingly analytical side of his brain. And all the time he stared at the two reporters as if testing their reaction.

"I think we have to be practical," he said. "The Liberal Party has now killed the two-party system of government: it has destroyed the two-party system. It is therefore a nuisance. The Party has been attacked by both the other Parties who would wish to see it destroyed. The one thing that the Party had was its integrity rather than its policy. Now, if you can destroy the integrity of the Party by pointing out that its leader has been the subject of serious allegations, the political advantage of attacking Thorpe was so obvious that for them not to do so must mean that to do so would endanger the whole system."

"The evidence of your first four months shows a consistent and persistent effort by the Establishment . . . to prevent the truth emerging. But then Wilson leads you two directly to the cover-up. This stands logic on its head. On the one hand you have got . . . the Establishment, the Royal Family (in the sense that Jeremy Thorpe is stepfather to three young men who are in direct line of succession to the Throne, however remotely) saying: 'No, we are going to protect Thorpe at all costs.' And you have a bizarre court trial of Newton. You have Scotland Yard holding letters . . . take all this. Then you have this wild thing whereby logic stops. What is Harold Wilson playing at and what is his game? It does not work to think that Harold Wilson has turned on Jeremy Thorpe, because if that were so he would have told you two."

Penrose made the point that Wilson had talked not just to them but also to the Director-General of the BBC, which gave the matter rather greater significance. But Bessell was still puzzled that Sir Harold had guided them in the direction of Norman Scott and the Liberal Party story.

"Harold Wilson," he said, "must have known that the help he was giving you would undermine Jeremy Thorpe's political position. For those who know, there is no real South African connection. As far as I am concerned, Jeremy's position is a simple ABC thing."

The Liberal Party upset was a matter for the politicians who had brought it about, Bessell believed. He could not understand the former Premier's motives. "Gordon Winter is the only tenuous connection with South Africa I can see," he said.

The reporters felt that Peter Bessell's cynicism about the unscrupulousness of "the Establishment" and certain individuals might well be simply a reflection of his own lack of scruple in the past. On the other hand, he had been a democratically elected Member of Parliament and had had several years in which to wander about the corridors at Westminster and observe the way in which the Establishment really worked. Even in the short time in which Penrose and Courtiour had been looking behind the scenes, many of their own illusions about democracy had been shaken. They certainly agreed with Bessell that a simple explanation for the whole situation did not seem possible at this stage.

They also felt strongly that it was misleading to dismiss the idea that there had been foreign interference in British democracy. This idea too could be part of a cover-up. The further the reporters

advanced, the more it became clear that the three main British political parties and even such a democratic institution as the BBC had all become inextricably tangled up in the Thorpe-Scott affair. So was it very likely that BOSS, and other foreign organisations which had a track-record for interference, had failed to exploit this embarrassing cover-up situation? If the doings of Norman Scott could have an influence on the decisions of successive Prime Ministers, would a foreign Intelligence Service be so forbearing and turn its back on exploiting the obvious possibilities?

From talking to Peter Bessell, and from reading his *aide-mémoire*, the reporters had learned a great deal more about Jeremy Thorpe's resignation as Liberal Party leader. And from what the former Prime Minister had told them about his own resignation it had become clear that the two sudden departures were somehow inextricably linked.

Once they had read through Bessell's testimony both reporters wondered if he might later withdraw it, just as he had eventually disowned the "blackmail" letter he had written about Norman Scott. But he had in time somewhat countered their suspicions by swearing an affidavit, in which he solemnly pledged that he had been telling them the truth in his account.

So far they had not been able to fault Bessell. Time and again his leads had checked out. Indeed he had a truly remarkable memory. It was an ability they had also witnessed in talking with Harold Wilson and Norman Scott.

For example, Bessell had gone into extraordinary detail about the visit David Holmes had paid him in California in January 1976. Holmes had arrived shortly before Scott was due to appear in court for the DHSS fraud and the later Newton trial. From their own conversations with David Holmes the reporters knew that at least some of Bessell's claims had been independently confirmed by his old Liberal colleague. Holmes had certainly never denied that he had made a special point of going to see Bessell in California that winter.

The question mark which still hung over his personal credibility largely stemmed from Holmes's visit. Holmes was among those who had wanted him to write the letter saying Norman Scott was a common blackmailer. Bessell had, of course, eventually agreed and composed and typed the letter himself on 20 January 1976, addressing it to the lawyer Michael Barnes. That controversial letter, when it was withdrawn, had led many people to discount him as a credible witness for other events he knew about.

In his defence Bessell had told the reporters exactly why he had written the "blackmail" letter. It was, he said, designed to help his close friend the Liberal leader. He had not wanted Jeremy to resign from the Party leadership because of the Scott affair. But, of course, he had not known in January that his letter would ever be made public. Holmes had solemnly promised on Jeremy's behalf that it would be shown only to Scott's lawyers in privilege.

Bessell, had reacted angrily when he learned what had happened: and had immediately disowned what he had written. He now said: "There was no truth in that letter, Scott never attempted to blackmail me . . . I wrote the letter and made the allegations against Scott because I believed that this was one way to prevent Scott standing up in court and making statements about Jeremy. The whole idea was to make Scott shut his mouth."

Bessell had spoken to the Press about the "blackmail" letter story in May that same year but he had still not filled in the bizarre events which had led up to it until on 15 October, he had started to fill in some of the missing pieces for the two reporters. He recalled conversations of which he said he had not spoken before and which he had now included in his *aide-mémoire*.

Bessell started by saying that David Holmes was an old friend. David had called him from his home in Manchester just before Christmas 1975 to say he would be in America in the New Year and would like to meet him. Bessell had been delighted to hear from him.

David Holmes arrived in San Diego, not far from Oceanside, on 19 January 1976, with a friend, Gerald Hagan. (The two men shared the spacious cottage the reporters had visited in the Manchester suburb of Salford.)

Holmes came out to Oceanside by himself and after the opening gossip he gradually turned the conversation round to his real purpose in coming. He mentioned the name Norman Scott and said that Scott was still a problem, both to Jeremy and to the Liberal Party. Bessell had almost forgotten about Scott and expressed surprise that he was still a nuisance.

Holmes explained that Scott had moved to a village in North Devon before the February 1974 General Election. The man had been spreading his story around the area, right in the middle of Jeremy's constituency. He had talked to newspaper men and had been writing a book which he intended publishing in the near future.

Bessell interrupted his friend, pointing out that Jeremy had won both Elections in North Devon that year. In February, in fact, he had turned his constituency into a firm Liberal stronghold. Surely Scott was no longer a danger?

But a new situation had arisen, said Holmes, which could well make the Thorpe-Scott story public in a particularly lurid and unpleasant way.

"According to David," said Bessell, "Scott had made friends with a civil aviation pilot called Andrew Newton. Newton's wife had been very jealous. Newton was promiscuous. And somehow Scott had managed to get hold of a photograph of Newton with a girl. The pose suggested an intimate relationship.

"Scott had then started blackmailing Newton and obtaining money from him on the threat of showing the photograph to Newton's wife," continued Bessell. "At least according to David Holmes."

Frankly he had been rather surprised at the suggestion that Norman Scott had turned to blackmail.

"I told David that it sounded unlike Scott," said Bessell. "Despite his many faults, from my experience he was not a blackmailer."

Holmes went on with his story, sketching in greater detail of what he claimed had happened.

"David mumbled something that Scott had deteriorated," said Bessell. "And that in the November Newton had been driving with Scott on Exmoor.

"Scott had demanded more money and Newton had refused.

"Anyway, the dog Scott had with him had suddenly attacked Newton whereupon Newton had shot and killed the dog. By coincidence a police car appeared at that moment and Scott had flagged it down. And the police then charged Newton with killing his dog.

"I asked Holmes if Newton had intended perhaps to shoot Scott," said Bessell. "Holmes shook his head and said 'No.'"

According to Holmes, Newton would face trial in England in February, then only a few weeks away. Scott would be a witness in the court case and would undoubtedly use the occasion to publicise his relationship with Jeremy. Naturally Scott could use the privilege of the court and the story would get into the newspapers.

"Jeremy seemed characteristically to be over-reacting," explained the ex-MP. "I thought it extremely unlikely that any

paper would be as mischievous as to publish. Most people would take it as the ravings of a layabout.

"David said I was wrong," said Bessell, and added "Jeremy had consulted Lord Goodman who apparently took the danger seriously. Years before Jeremy and I had seen the lawyer together to get advice about Scott.

"I began to take the matter more seriously. Lord Goodman was a brilliant lawyer: I was aware of his reputation of course.

"David wanted me to write a confidential letter to Scott's solicitors in the West Country," said Bessell. "I was to say that Scott had blackmailed me before. We would then let it be known to Scott's solicitors that if their client did not mention Jeremy in court I would not do anything further.

"If he did I would swear an affidavit that Scott had blackmailed me and this, along with Newton's evidence, would ensure that Scott would be charged by the public prosecutor, and convicted and sent to prison.

"This threat would deter Scott from mentioning Jeremy's name in court."

Bessell had listened carefully to the plan and said he disliked it from the beginning. He thought it unethical.

"Apart from anything else," he said, "Scott had never blackmailed me. If I wrote such a letter I would be incriminating Jeremy since the only matter Scott could have blackmailed me over was his friendship with Jeremy.

"Holmes asked if I would be willing to say that Scott knew something of my business affairs. And had been blackmailing me over that."

Bessell said he told Holmes that there was nothing to blackmail him about in his business life. Holmes suggested an alternative reason for putting into the letter. Perhaps Scott had found out something of a secretary he had once had an affair with? Bessell told Holmes they would be skating on very thin ice: his affairs had never been a secret at the House of Commons! The idea that Scott could have blackmailed him over that kind of information was ludicrous.

"David said it didn't matter," Bessell continued. "Only Scott's solicitor, I was told, would see the letter." Bessell was worried about the scheme. For instance what would happen if Norman Scott's solicitor called his bluff?

"I was prepared to help Jeremy again," he explained, "but I couldn't risk being required to give evidence in a British court.

Bessell said he was worried particularly that he was also being asked to swear an affidavit.

"I added that on oath I would do more harm than good since the letter would be a fabrication. But David said a letter without an affidavit to support it would not be admissible as evidence in court."

Holmes had repeated that Bessell was in no danger of being taken back to England to give evidence at the Newton trial.

Bessell said: "Indeed he and Jeremy would not think of asking me to do anything that might harm me after all I had been through."

Bessell went on to describe a gift which Jeremy had sent with Holmes. It was a book, called *Life with Lloyd George* and the Liberal leader had written inside: "For Peter from Jeremy, with affection from one Liberal to another Liberal about a third Liberal – 'Vive les Trois Mousquetaiers!!' New Year, 1976."

David Holmes had brought two letters with him from the Liberal leader. David had gone to open them, he said, and then stopped. The visitor explained that they were written in such a way that if he had had a street accident they would have been incomprehensible to a stranger.

Bessell claimed he was still worried about writing a letter, however privately, which accused Scott of being a blackmailer. The plan could backfire and create enormous new problems in his life. He had expressed his fears in front of his old colleague.

"To put such a thing on record was repugnant to me," he told the reporters. "Did Holmes think it would be sufficient for me to say that Scott had *attempted* to blackmail me?" But Bessell then thought of a possible compromise solution.

"My reason for this was that I had a vague recollection that Scott had threatened to make trouble for Jeremy and the Liberal Party but I had not taken it very seriously. And I had given him a sum, normally £5. Holmes said it would be much stronger if I said that Scott had actually blackmailed me. And surely the incident I had recalled could be interpreted as blackmail? I admitted that Holmes might be technically correct but in the context of my whole involvement I did not think it a fair assessment."

Bessell's last-minute attempts to rationalise what he was doing had been forgotten. So too had been his doubts about the morality of what he was agreeing to do for his friend.

Then Holmes had said there was something equally grave which he had not told him about.

"Holmes reminded me of the correspondence I had had with Scott and how letters to Scott had been the basis for the 1971 Liberal Party enquiry." He added that shortly before the February 1974 General Election campaign, Scott had threatened to have the letters copied and distributed throughout North Devon. Had he done so, there would have been considerable damage done to the Liberal Party."

Bessell had pointed out that the letters written from his office years before did not incriminate him: they were harmless. Holmes had gone on to say that it had been decided, however, that the only thing to do was to buy the letters from Scott.

"Holmes said he had seen Scott and paid £10,000 for them," said Bessell. "This figure astounded me and I said so. The letters were worthless and I was sure Scott would have parted with them for less than a tenth of the sum."

"Holmes was now in deadly earnest," said Bessell. He had impressed the seriousness of the situation the Liberal leader now faced on to the expatriate Englishman.

"If Scott had been led to believe that my old letters were worth £10,000 he had also probably realised how much damage he could do," said Bessell. "To have paid that amount was really stupid I added at the time."

But Holmes had won the argument that day, according to Bessell. He had agreed that the £10,000 Holmes claimed he had paid to Scott changed the whole picture. He would write a letter for David to take back to England.

But why had David Holmes mentioned a figure of £10,000? In time Holmes was publicly to admit paying £2,500 secretly to get hold of documents belonging to Norman Scott. But £2,500, not £10,000. So why the discrepancy between the two amounts the reporters wondered. In any event Bessell and Diane believed the figure of £10,000 was particularly significant.

Bessell had agreed that he would help. In the morning he would write a letter in a somewhat modified form.

"Holmes said how grateful he was for my help," Bessell said. "I said I regretted that anybody should have doubted that I would help."

"I remember he thanked me profusely. I looked at him and for a moment I had a sort of feeling. I saw his eyes had a kind of hunted look. Do you know what I mean: something about fear and I couldn't understand that."

Diane had then joined in the memory of that evening back in

January. She agreed, she said, that Holmes had seemed frightened, worried, anxious about matters which he did not discuss in front of her.

"It wasn't something I put into words in my mind," said Bessell. "But it just seemed peculiar that he should look like that because as far as I could see he was not personally involved at all in the remotest degree. It was just Jeremy who was under threat in the event that Norman Scott blew his top at the trial and said more than he should. I didn't see any reason why David should have fears himself."

"We can be deeply concerned for our friends," he said, "we can be sad and unhappy and anxious to help them but we don't have a look of fear when we are talking about somebody who is threatening someone."

The following morning at the Bridge Motor Inn, Bessell began typing out the letter on his small portable typewriter. Holmes, he said, sat in the room quietly. At times Bessell had asked a question and his friend had done his best to answer it. Holmes was clearly anxious for the letter to be composed quickly so that he could leave Oceanside at once. Bessell said his major concern was that his letter should never, of course, be made public. He reminded David that he owed a huge debt to Diane and her father. They must not be placed at risk.

"I asked David what guarantee there was that the letter would never be disclosed," Bessell claimed. "He replied that there was no possibility of its ever being made public. And I had his word and Jeremy's on that point."

Bessell turned to the two reporters, almost as if he sensed they were critical of his naivety.

"You must remember," he said, "Jeremy and David were people I'd known for almost twenty years."

The letter was addressed to Michael Barnes, whom Bessell believed at the time was Norman Scott's solicitor. In fact, of course, he was the Liberal leader's.

"I remarked on how youthful David still looked and chided Jeremy for sending me his letter via Holmes in a sealed rather than an open letter," Bessell went on.

According to Bessell, Holmes had then insisted that he put a call through to England.

"Holmes insisted on putting in the call," said Bessell. "But the person he wished to speak to was apparently not at home and

David spoke to the man's wife after saying he was in California. Then he asked her to give her husband a message. It was simply: 'Mission Accomplished.'"

At the time Bessell had found the remark distinctly odd. "Mission Accomplished."

While driving Holmes to San Diego airport Bessell had been increasingly concerned about the letter he had written. The phrase "Mission Accomplished", and other things he had also heard, had made him wish he had never written the letter Holmes now had in his suitcase. Eventually Bessell had told Holmes that he had changed his mind.

"I told David that he must give me back the letter, at least for the moment," he claimed. "I would reconsider the whole matter and if I concluded that the letter could stand, he would have to return and pick up the letter later."

"Holmes understood and raised no objections and said the letter was in his briefcase in the trunk of the car which I knew to be correct," said Bessell.

Before they reached San Diego airport, they picked up Gerald Hagan from his hotel. At the airport Bessell dropped his passengers at the main entrance. He would park the car while they checked in their baggage. Then Holmes could find his letter and hand it back to him before they left.

"It took me longer than I expected and although I ran most of the way back to the passenger building, I couldn't find Holmes or Hagan when I got there," said Bessell.

Bessell had hurried to the departure gate, but had found that Holmes and Hagan were already aboard their plane. Bessell had faced a difficult problem. He wanted to help his friend in England, but no longer wanted to be involved he said with a letter which was an out-and-out fabrication. Indeed to write such a letter could not only put Scott in jail, it could also lead eventually to charges being brought against himself.

"If I wrote to Barnes, whom I thought was Scott's solicitor, and told him to ignore the letter he would shortly be receiving, that would be extremely dangerous."

Bessell had believed that Holmes would mail the letter back to him. He was to be proved wrong. It had not been accompanied by an affidavit but it appeared to show that Scott had attempted to blackmail Bessell in the past.

The "cover-up" letter had been shown to Michael Barnes, the



Barnstaple police and the Parliamentary Liberal Party. In the difficult days around Scott's original outburst in court it had helped answer some of Thorpe's sternest critics at Westminster. It seemed to prove, moreover, why Peter Bessell had paid sums of money to Scott in past years. Any blame attaching to the affair had momentarily swung on to the ex-MP's shoulders. Scott seemed to many MPs to be nothing more than a blackmailing wretch. After all, had not Peter Bessell's letter made that quite explicit?

Exactly why Bessell had allowed himself to be drawn into such a crude plan still troubled the two reporters. Sometimes they wondered if the ex-MP really knew the answer to that question. He had written it in haste he said and for the best possible motives. He wanted only to help out a friend in desperate need.

"It has been suggested that I was flattered after such a long time that my help was still needed," said Bessell. "I'm not sure if I was flattered but at the time I felt very much cut off from old friends and was certainly more open to a suggestion of the kind Holmes had made to me than I would have been under normal conditions."

Bessell later wrote that in retrospect he was wrong and irresponsible to write the "blackmail" letter to Michael Barnes. "I was destined to pay for it," he added somewhat bitterly.

On Sunday 1 February 1976, David Holmes had telephoned Bessell from England.

"David told me," Bessell said, "that on the previous Thursday, 29 January, Scott had appeared in court at Barnstaple. During the hearing over a DHSS fraud charge Scott had claimed he was being persecuted for his relationship with Jeremy. Holmes said my letter was no longer needed." And Holmes had promised to destroy it.

"I was then awakened at 3 am on the morning of 2 February," said Bessell, "by a telephone call from my solicitor in London, Charles Negus-Fancy. Charles told me that the papers had been full of the Scott outburst since Friday and that one story receiving great prominence was that the Liberal Whip, Cyril Smith, had told the Press that Jeremy had shown him a copy of an affidavit in which I'd stated that Scott had blackmailed me over a woman . . . I'd told Charles I'd not sworn my letter as an affidavit which was true. I said that I'd written a letter saying these things on solemn undertaking that it would never be made public."

Following in the slipstream of the lawyers and the politicians who knew about the Bessell letter, came a few enterprising reporters who had got wind of the affair and began to make

enquiries. But nobody in Fleet Street knew exactly where Bessell was living abroad. It took time before the *Daily Mail*, on Thursday 6 May, carried a front-page headline which said simply: "Revealed – ex-MP Peter Bessell's secret meeting in California to talk about Scott and the Party Leader. I TOLD LIES TO PROTECT THORPE."

The *Mail* told its readers that the messenger who visited Bessell almost four months before was David Holmes, the Party's ex-Deputy Treasurer.

"Mr Holmes, a former merchant banker who was best man at Jeremy Thorpe's first wedding, is the man who paid £2,500 to Norman Scott for a bundle of letters. He did so, he claimed, on his own behalf and with his own money without the knowledge of the Liberal leader."

When a reporter approached Jeremy Thorpe that same evening and asked for a comment about his friend's visit to California, the Liberal leader claimed he knew nothing about Holmes going to see Bessell in Oceanside. However, the politician had been in close touch with Peter Bessell in January and February to discuss the cover-up letter. Bessell had tapes and letters he said to prove it.

On 19 February the Liberal leader had written to Bessell a letter which reflected his grave anxieties at that time. He had addressed the envelope to "Joseph Bissell" in Oceanside, presumably as a precaution to stop it falling into the wrong hands.

19 February, 1976.

In confidence.

Personal.

House of Commons,  
London, SW1A 0AA.

My Dear Peter,

I tried telephoning but wisely you are off the hook. I think we are emerging from the tunnel and I owe you an explanation and hope to be allowed to give a piv. Your letter was shown to *no-one* (that is including Cyril Smith). However, his loyalty was critical and I'll paraphrase the broad outlines of your letter.

Phase I. Cyril having panicked, wrongly referred to its existence, then wrongly described its contents (e.g. "Submitted your London solicitor / affidavit available etc. etc."). This was disastrous. Quite unauthorised by me.\*

Phase II. You were caught on the hop by the Press and denied almost everything in the letter. I don't blame you but it didn't enhance anybody's credibility.

\* He's opened his mouth too often!

Phase III. You put out your statement confirming the broad outline and Phase IV to my horror now tell Barnes that you want to withdraw the letter in view of the adverse publicity. What I want you to consider is:

a) The letter is already with the police. b) They are not likely to publish and nor is anyone else. No more publicity.

1) The only result of withdrawal is to suggest that your letter was a fabrication – which it was not.

2) That there may be some other explanation for those payments which frankly there isn't.

3) That we are lying like troopers which we are not.

The police I gather don't know whether to believe the dog man [Newton] or Scott. Scott had some ridiculous theory that Marion, self and/or the Government hired Newton! Newton, according to the Daily Mirror crime reporter had been living with Scott homosexually – went straight and was blackmailed by Scott. Who do they believe? There is nothing to compel you to come to Britain to give evidence against Scott, particularly if you are not prepared to allege blackmail. But if they think that Scott at least tried to pressurise you and he did then it appears consistent with Newton's experience.

In view of the denials and counter denials it is not impossible that the police may want to interview you. My advice is a) Your letter is correct. b) You wanted to withdraw since the undertaking of confidentiality was breached. c) Scott is a Lunatic. d) Whatever interpretation may be placed on the letters you do not wish to prefer a charge of blackmail against Scott partly because your health would not permit travelling to Britain, and partly because Scott has tried to wreck enough lives without having a go at yours. All the above is right if justice is to be done. The Press are still being bloody and trying to destroy me. Harold on the other hand is being quite superb.

The police asked me what my view was and I said I thought it looked as if Scott had tried to pressurise you but you had slapped him down. Alas I think the Press would have hounded you in any event since 3 papers had copies of your letters and had had them for several years, and I understand that Junor knew your address. All this is conjecture but I think reasonable.

The whole story has been a nightmare but I am damned if that bloody lunatic is going to destroy me and the Party. So far I've

had 700 letters in support. Good news Pauline (Bessell) has got a good job and sets off on Sunday. My love and apologies to Diane. Stand firm and we shall win through. You need say nothing more. Your letter is enough. Bless you. Take care of yourself and remember LL. G. [Lloyd George.]

Ever yours affectionately,  
Jeremy.

Your letter was superb, to Emlyn.  
None of us have anything to hide.

When the Liberal leader wrote that "to my horror you now tell Barnes that you want to withdraw the letter", he was referring to a letter Bessell had already sent to Michael Barnes on 8 February 1976. The letter had informed the lawyer, and indirectly his friend Jeremy, that he now wished to withdraw his written statement that Scott was a blackmailer.

Bessell had shown his fury that his letter had been made public.

"This is something which if the reports are accurate I can be forgiven for regarding as wholly mischievous and totally irresponsible," he had told Barnes.

Bessell's second reason for withdrawing his cover-up letter was because, he had said, it was "hurriedly written and muddled". He had added: "In the past week, when many members of the Press have repeatedly asked me to recall the events of all those years ago I soon realised that the letter contained several serious inaccuracies and that in its present form it is useless."

The former MP had then written another letter about the Scott scandal to his former Parliamentary colleague Emlyn Hooson. The lawyer was the man he had skilfully out-manoeuvred at the time of the secret Liberal Party enquiry in the summer of 1971. Then with almost Machiavellian adroitness and a pinch of luck, Bessell had helped discredit the genial Welshman in the eyes of his fellow Parliamentarians: Lord Byers and David Steel.

Bessell had begun his letter of 8 February 1976 to Hooson: "I have been told by a 'Daily Mirror' reporter that you have stated that you consider that I should return to Britain to clear things up and that I owe it to the Liberal Party and Jeremy to do so."

He had gone on to say that he was surprised that Hooson had not written to him directly. He had complained he said of those "many reports of things that I and others are alleged to have said.

Some of these reports later proved to be either totally false or to have been so far quoted out of their context as to give them a different meaning."

The retired politician, now isolated in Oceanside, had then reminded Hooson of the conclusions the Party enquiry came to in 1971. For the Welsh MP the reminder had a faint sting to it, even perhaps a veiled threat.

"You, David [Steel] and Frank [Byers] investigated the allegations against Jeremy and satisfied yourselves that they were totally without foundation," he had written. "You also concluded there was nothing sinister or extraordinary about the small retainer I paid to Scott. Nothing of any significance has occurred since your investigation took place apart from Scott's outburst in Court which I could not have told you and David and Frank anything that you did not know in 1971. If your conclusions in 1971 were correct, and taking into account the ability and integrity of all three of you, I am certain that they were, then it follows that they remain sound in 1976."

The letter was Peter Bessell's last attempt to confuse Emlyn Hooson once again. In February 1976 he still wanted to save the Party leader from resignation. Bessell had out-manoeuvred Hooson before and he hoped he might succeed again five years later. He had sent a copy of his letter to Hooson to the Liberal leader.

On 20 February 1976 the Welsh MP replied to Bessell's letter concentrating on the ex-MP's remarks about the 1971 enquiry. He had written:

"I tell you frankly that my great problem, and that of my colleagues to whom I have reported the fact, is that in a short telephone conversation from your Cornwall home in 1971 you said to me 'It was bound to come out, sometime.'"

Hooson had gone on to complain that he had told David Steel "within minutes of our conversation and he tried to contact you but failed. However, I understand that a few days later you told David [that I had misunderstood you]. As we have not met or spoken to each other since that date, I do think that you owe it to me to clear the matter up."

Emlyn Hooson then revealed his primary worry at the time: "Otherwise I am left in the position that the Press may be able to prove something and allege we tried to cover up which I certainly have not done."

Bessell had suspected that his former colleague was wriggling on

an embarrassed hook and he was delighted at the thought. In a letter to Jeremy Thorpe on 25 February 1976 he did not disguise a certain pleasure.

"I have had a reply from Hooson," he wrote. "It is an interesting letter. It is clear that he is afraid of being accused of a 'cover-up' in 1971. I shall not reply. Let him sweat!"

Elsewhere in the letter, Bessell had answered in some detail the points raised in Thorpe's letter of 19 February. He had accepted, he said, at that time his friend's version of events around the January 1976 letter. But he suggested now that there might be another purpose in Holmes having asked him to write that letter, although he had not included what he had in mind in his letter.

"If I had known any other purpose behind the request for the letter I would have refused the request," he stated plainly. Such bluntness from Bessell to his friend was not a characteristic of their correspondence in the past.

In the remainder of the letter Peter Bessell outlined some of his major grouses about the whole sorry affair.

"If I have one, almost over-riding grumble it is that no one has kept me informed," he wrote. He went on to talk about his sudden credibility problem, largely brought about he said by the cover-up letter and the Press reaction to it.

"My credibility had taken a further blow as a result of the last few weeks," he complained. "But it is simply self-destructive to try to shatter the remnants. Cannot you see that it is imperative that I am believed? Alas, too often, innocent people are destroyed by their persecutors . . . In our last telephone conversation I told you (as did Diane) that I will stand fast. I know you are under terrible, terrible pressures – pressures that I know something about and I am not resentful or angry."

It was undoubtedly a powerful and passionate letter. But the letter was a fabrication. Bessell later unashamedly admitted that, and said he was destined to pay for his mistake.

On 1 March 1976, Bessell sent a more straightforward letter to Jeremy Thorpe. A *Daily Express* reporter from London, who thought the Scott affair was dying down in the Press, had called him on the phone.

But the story had not died down as many might have wished. One person who found himself being blown to and fro by the Liberal Party tragedy was the Labour Prime Minister. In several meetings at the Commons early in 1976 Jeremy Thorpe had

brought Harold Wilson up to date with the latest news. The Prime Minister had listened to how he hoped to retain the Liberal leadership. Sir Harold told the reporters that he had strongly urged his friend not to resign. As far as he was concerned, hanging on to the Liberal leadership was vital.

On their last evening in Oceanside, Bessell also asked to see some of the documents that Frederick Cheeseman had passed to the two reporters. He read through Courtiour's file on Cheeseman, seeming engrossed in the information it contained. The reporter said that Cheeseman was rather odd because he had stayed in regular touch with them and provided them with further material which seemed to indicate his involvement with Intelligence work even after he had declared publicly that he was only a "hoaxer".

After considering carefully for a while, Bessell seemed suddenly to take a decision: "Look," he said, "I think I can give you some introductions in Washington that may be helpful."

He told Courtiour to make notes and said: "I will give you a letter of introduction to someone in Washington. You must say, without any reason, that Peter is satisfied that you must see people at the National Security Agency." He gave Courtiour the name of a Senator who he felt should arrange introductions for them to the NSA but said he would leave it to the contact he was sending them to.

Bessell's behaviour puzzled Courtiour. Did the former Liberal MP really think that he had influence in Washington with the largest of the American Intelligence Agencies? There had been no clues in the course of their earlier talks with Bessell or over the past few days that he had this sort of high-powered contact.

The next day Bessell had volunteered to drive them to Los Angeles to catch their flight to Washington. They talked at one point at a level-crossing waiting for the Santa Fe train to pass. Its tolling bell had made an appropriately funereal background to the conversation in the car and it was in the car as he drove them to Los Angeles airport that Bessell delivered the final and most astonishing information of their visit. The conversation turned to the time immediately after his disappearance in the spring of 1974. He explained that he had first gone to Mexico where he had suffered a heart attack. Then, when he had recovered sufficiently, he had driven back over the border into the United States. Diane's father had been supportive and had helped pay off many of his debts and Diane herself had flown to England to sort out his affairs while he recuperated in California.

He had called a couple of people he knew in Washington. They were civil servants. After all, he had no legal right to remain in the United States, and he was still officially missing and on the run. As Bessell described it, they had said:

"'All right, just don't worry. As far as we're concerned you are officially a missing person. There'll be no possibility of your having any embarrassment at all. We'll arrange for you to have proper identification right away,' which they did, 'so that if you happen to run into a policeman somewhere, or you knock down an old lady in the street, you aren't going to find yourself in difficulties.

"'We'll make the path absolutely smooth for you.' And by God they did. They were absolutely marvellous."

"These were sneaky civil servants in Washington?" Penrose asked, confused by the reported conversation.

"Yes. But having said that," replied Bessell at once, "nothing in this country is that simple. There's a 'what's in it for me' which is very much the case here."

The reporters asked him what he meant: did he have to do something in return?

"I have been asked if I will run a message, things of that sort."

"I'm sorry, I'm totally lost," said Courtiour, perplexed. "Running messages?"

"It's not in any sense secret stuff that I deal with," Bessell replied without obvious embarrassment. "But I'm not a security risk to the United States, or a security risk to anybody. But they find it useful to have this Englishman who between 1967 and 1972 was regarded as reliable and could be used in any way that was spooky. But at the same time could keep his mouth shut. If he saw anything confidential, then he would treat it confidentially."

The subject changed to their trip to Washington, but Penrose kept returning to Bessell's reference to "running messages".

"I am sorry to be dumb," he persisted, "but when you say 'messages', can you say anything more about that?"

"No, not really," said Bessell pointedly. "If you like, it is sometimes important that one person here, Mr A, say, should tell Mr X. But Mr A cannot pick up the telephone and say 'I am doing it' because, well, tapped wires, a million things. But he could call Mr X, and say: 'Our friend Mr B, that nutty Englishman, is around and he'll come and talk to you.' That sort of thing."

"But you don't ultimately know who the person you are helping

is?" Penrose asked. "Who the message is for?" Bessell was beginning to remind him of Frederick Cheeseman.

"Oh yes, absolutely, always," said Bessell immediately. "I know exactly who they are and what they are working for. And in all cases it is literally the United States Government.

"Now at the height of the Vietnam war, things like that happened when they wanted, particularly towards the end, messages literally carried to representatives of the South Vietnamese Government. That's how I met Thieu on two occasions. Nobody knew it, and it was all deftly organised."

"You actually went to Vietnam?" Penrose said, intrigued.

"You were a member of the Parliamentary Commission that went to South Vietnam?" Courtiour added. "When was it . . . in 1967?"

"That's right, that's right," said Bessell. "I wasn't in the Parliamentary Commission when it was first appointed. I think the United States Embassy in London rather threw the Foreign Office by saying: 'Don't you think you ought to have a Liberal MP along?'"

"The Foreign Office replied: 'There are only three MPs going out, what do you want a Liberal for? We normally only have a Liberal MP when there are twenty-three going out.'

"They said: 'No, no, we think this fellow Peter Bessell would be good.'

"Of course, I knew already that I was going to be asked to go, but you see it was a lovely way of doing it. But the problem was my appointment was separate from the other three MPs. And – oh God! – so I had to pretend that I was bored about the trip: 'No, I didn't want to go to Vietnam. No, I was not going there,' and so on."

But Bessell did go, as Penrose and Courtiour were able to confirm a few weeks later after their return to England. He had joined two Labour MPs – Dr John Dunwoody, the MP for Falmouth and Camborne, and Richard Mitchell, the MP for Southampton, Itchen – and the Conservative MP for Honiton Peter Emery. The delegation had reached Saigon on 22 April 1967, and for part of their month's visit to the war-ravaged country they had stayed at the Majestic Hotel. Richard Mitchell still had a photograph of the delegation sitting alongside the South Vietnamese Prime Minister, Air Vice-Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky.

Dr Dunwoody told Courtiour that Peter Bessell did seem to

have "other interests" on the trip. "We thought they were business interests," he said.

In the car to the airport Bessell told the reporters that he had used his business interests as an excuse to leave the delegation early.

"There was a second trip which nobody knew anything about and that was after I ceased to be an MP and it was very brief and very exhausting."

The reporters were startled by Bessell's story. Was this former MP some kind of American agent, a spy sitting inside Westminster? When they asked Bessell he pushed aside the criticism their question implied.

"The South Vietnamese Government paid the entire cost of the thing," he said. "In that sense I had no obligation to Parliament."

Penrose asked him if he had told Jeremy Thorpe, who was by then the Liberal leader, about the covert part of his visit.

"Absolutely not, Jeremy knew I had contacts in Washington. When he wanted something there I said, 'OK, I will organise that.' He would say, 'Well how are you doing that?' I would say, 'Well, I have a friend who works in the Republican Party' or some such bullshit. Jeremy swallowed it, so I would put through a phone call and that was that.

"The trouble with Jeremy is that he cannot resist saying that his friends are doing something, and that's terribly dangerous."

But why did Bessell work for the Americans? Was it money, a debt he owed, politics or some spurious air of glamour which being a spy has for some people?

Bessell was not put out by the question. During the war he had lectured for the Ministry of Information: sometimes to American servicemen. He simply liked Americans and America.

"My views on Vietnam were known in Washington and the Johnson administration got to know," he said, speaking in a matter-of-fact way. "Johnson was desperate to get out of Vietnam, but the pressures in this country were very different from those which the Press were carrying. Congress was divided and there was the problem of pulling out of the war too fast. It could so badly damage the economy that it was going to create a vast depression, that was the theory.

"So knowing all these complications and problems, my attitude was that the Allies should try and stick together.

"Anyway, it was found from time to time that my friends in

Washington could use a British subject rather than an American, more or less as a message-carrier. Things of that sort. Not to the British Government, let me say. I had absolutely nothing whatever to do with the British Government. I suppose I have never known whether the British Government ever knew about it."

What would his former constituents in Bodmin make of it, Penrose thought to himself. But why was Bessell telling them about a particularly secret aspect of his past? Could he be lying for effect? Or was he, more probably, confessing to them about a role which had greater significance than he cared to admit? Bessell had already boasted to Penrose and Courtiour that "I was always able to influence Jeremy Thorpe in all matters relating to Scott and frankly everything else if I really put my mind to it". He had also admitted that in taking care of the Scott problem he had set out to compromise Ministers in Harold Wilson's Labour Government. If he had consistently lied, he said it was out of loyalty to his friend and his Party. But now he was telling them that while a Member of Parliament he had worked for the American Government; and if this was true would it provide a stronger motivation for the little pushes and twists – including all the apparently inexplicable blunders – that he had given to the events that had tormented the Liberal leader and his friends for over sixteen years?

In talking about plans and conversations that other people might regard with the utmost seriousness, Bessell had simply used the word "charades". And now he went on to speak about the Intelligence business as a game.

"There is one extraordinary thing about this game," he said, "not only in this country but also in Washington. That is, unless you are channelled through the right people you will simply get the honourable brush off and you simply can't get back in the game.

"Because you went to see Mr Jones in Washington and he came to the conclusion that there is no substance in what you are saying, Mr Jones thinks: 'They have got nothing and it's not worth bothering.'

"This runs the whole gamut because the moment you get into Washington, the first time you go into any government office, it doesn't matter which one it is, even the Department of Agriculture, you have to give identification and automatically it goes straight into the computer and it's there for the entire government offices. If it isn't right, and you have seen Mr Jones, and Mr Jones

is a low echelon character who has no influence, well, because you know this and don't tell him anything, it will influence his report.

"When you go across to the CIA they already have that damned computer card and the whole thing is screwed up. So that was why I was concerned you go and see a journalist in Washington, although a journalist who works in a completely different way."

Courtiour said he was happy about any Press contacts Bessell might have in Washington: they knew nobody there. But if he was a journalist, surely there was a problem he might publish part of their story?

"No, no, no. When I introduce you to him on this level he would never dare. Now if you say to me, 'Is Dave spooky?' I have to say to you, 'I don't know.' But he has got all the right contacts with all the right people and he can pick up the telephone and talk to the most amazing people."

Bessell then handed the reporters a sealed envelope which he instructed them to take unopened to his "journalist" acquaintance in Washington.

When Bessell left them, both reporters were suffering from a feeling of nervous expectation. With this letter in their pocket, they were about to be taken for a ride on a big American jet.

## Chapter 25

Penrose waited until the plane to Washington had levelled out and then held the letter of introduction to the porthole window, wondering what it contained. The name on the front meant nothing to him. Bessell had sealed the envelope with his normal signature across the flap.

While Penrose controlled his curiosity by gazing down at the spectacle of the Rocky Mountains, Courtiour sought relaxation in TWA's in-flight movie. That afternoon it happened to be a spy movie which, according to the programme, was about "buying . . . selling . . . and zapping your friends . . . it's all part of the game." At the same time it was described as a "dramatic action adventure of a deadly conflict between the CIA and its Russian counterparts".

In Washington the next day, 20 October, Courtiour called the number Bessell had given him and that evening a tall, clean-cut, fair-haired American in his early thirties walked into their suite at the Park Central Hotel. He seemed brimming with confidence, prosperity and overwhelming friendliness.

"What brings you to this active side of the pond?" he asked smiling broadly.

"I only wish we knew exactly," replied Courtiour, aware that his genuine ignorance made him sound uncommunicative. He recalled that Bessell had been uncertain for whom this man "Dave" actually worked; on the one hand Bessell had described him as some kind of journalist, but he had also implied that it was necessary to be frank with him if the reporters were to "get in at the right level". How much should they reveal about what they had learned so far on their trip to America and what they hoped to find out in the future? For a man they had never met before, "Dave" was unusually familiar from the outset. He said at once that he would be delighted to show them around Washington. Perhaps, he offered, he could open a few doors for them on Capitol Hill. It appeared he not only knew many of the prominent politicians there, he was also related to a few of them and spoke of his

connections with the Kennedy family and other scions of well-settled New England Society.

When he had read Peter Bessell's letter of introduction he said: "You're welcome to read it. Besides, it doesn't tell me a goddam thing." He smiled and explained to the reporters that he did not know the former British MP at all well. But on one occasion they had spent the day together and from what he knew of him he appeared a "very credible" person. He genuinely liked the guy, he added.

Courtior asked him pointedly what he did for a living.

"I consider myself a journalist of sorts," he replied confidently.

From the picture he drew of himself, "Dave" appeared to be a freelancer who worked for the English-speaking foreign media. But Courtior and Penrose had met many Press "stringers" around the world and the American was unlike any of them. For one thing, he did not mention payment for any of the help he might be able to provide.

The reporters explained that they wanted to talk with American politicians about their country's new approach in Southern Africa. At that time, in October 1976, African nationalist leaders were attending a conference in Geneva to discuss the future of Rhodesia with Prime Minister Ian Smith and the eyes of the world were turned more anxiously than ever on the violent problems of emerging black Africa. In particular, many of those eyes were focused on the practical effects of exchanges between the American administration and the white regime in South Africa. It had been one of the oddities of the reporters' contact with Cheeseman that he had apparently known about Kissinger's forthcoming meeting with Vorster long before it had been announced in the Press.

It was against this background too that the reporters spoke of Harold Wilson's allegations about South Africa and their connection with the ex-Prime Minister. The American seemed unusually well informed about the suggestion of clandestine interference in British political life. He followed the British Press closely, he said. The sudden appearance of Frederick Cheeseman in May that year did not strike him as being altogether odd. Nor indeed did that of other "oddball" figures who had flitted momentarily across the political stage at the same time. Perhaps he could help by doing some digging in the Cheeseman area? He too would like to know whether the man was a total phoney or in some ways

genuine. In fact, like Peter Bessell, he seemed fascinated with Cheeseman's identity and role.

"You're holding me in too much suspense," he said smiling. "I'd just love to see the military documents you tell me he carried around with him."

"I've met a lot of old spooks," he said. "Two mistakes. One is to think they're all that bright. Usually they're pretty stupid people. The other is to believe that sane people would become involved in the madder aspects of intelligence work . . . When people sit at the CIA at Langley or at MI5 in London, or wherever it is, thinking up some bizarre scheme . . . I mean, would you do it? You see, every agency needs total oddballs at some time or other."

Before leaving them, the American promised again to show them around Washington. He added that he would speak to an Englishman he knew who had formerly been in RAF Intelligence. There was a possibility he might be able to help them too. He could also introduce them to Colonel Fletcher Prouty who had been a top-level liaison officer between the US military and the CIA and might turn out to be useful. He would collect the reporters the next day after the meeting which they had fixed with the Director of the Foreign Press Center, Walter A. Kohl.

True to his word, "Dave" came back to the reporters when they were sitting in Kohl's office. From the American Embassy in London Kohl had understood the reporters would like to meet some Press "contacts" inside the CIA and he explained that approaches had already been made on their behalf with people at the Agency. But personally it was a world he preferred to keep apart from at the Center. It might be misinterpreted in some quarters. So Courtiour and Penrose would have to wait patiently at their hotel: things might happen, they might not.

It was at that point that the telephone rang on his desk and Kohl picked up the receiver.

Penrose noticed that the Center had already opened a personal file on him. It was lying open on the desk. While Kohl was speaking he tried to read upside down what was inside it. "Number 1605. Barrie Penrose: former BBC official." Typical American efficiency, the reporter thought to himself, wondering why Courtiour's file was not there.

"Someone is asking me how long you two are going to be with me," said Kohl. Did they know the man?

Courtior nodded, explaining that he was a Washington journalist they had met. The man worked a good deal, apparently, with overseas journalists.

The Director of the Foreign Press Center said he had never heard the name before and there was a distinct look of suspicion on his face.

"Perhaps you're in good hands already," he said wryly as the reporters left his office a few minutes later.

For the rest of the day "Dave" ferried the two ex-BBC men around Washington. Up at Capitol Hill he walked in and out of offices at the Senate as if he had been doing it all his life.

In Senator Tunney's office Courtior was given useful background material about the recent American involvement in Angola. He spoke to Mark Moran, Senator Tunney's Legislative Assistant, who had been sent on a fact-finding mission to southern Africa shortly before. The Assistant discussed with Courtior the role of the CIA and white mercenaries in Angola, and Moran claimed that until recently American policy there had been based on mistaken National Security Agency forecasts. The NSA had apparently believed in 1969 that the black liberation groups stood little chance of success. For the American Government to show support for the white regimes of southern Africa had therefore seemed both safe and logical. But the collapse of Marcello Caetano's right-wing regime in Portugal in April 1974 had contributed to the establishment of black governments in Mozambique and later Angola. Then, of course, the political situation in the area was made even more complicated because the Russians and the Cubans had become closely involved.

Courtior sought Moran's opinion on the subject which directly concerned the two reporters. He wanted to know if the Americans had any evidence that South Africa had been interfering in British political life.

Moran was aware of the smear campaign which Harold Wilson had described in Parliament. He said that the motivation for interference in Britain certainly existed. Senator Tunney had discovered evidence that after the Portuguese coup d'état right-wing groups, backed financially by big business interests, had been involved in clandestine operations from outside Portugal. It seemed logical that similar activities could have taken place in Great Britain. The political complexion of the Government in power at Westminster was clearly vital in terms of the unfolding



events in southern Africa and in simple terms South Africa would, of course, prefer to have a solidly supportive right-wing Conservative government in London. Harold Wilson, in his dealings with Rhodesia and South Africa, had demonstrated his hostility towards the white regimes of the area.

Meanwhile, the helpful "Dave" had arranged for the Englishman – the ex-RAF Intelligence officer he had mentioned – to meet the reporters back at their hotel. The newcomer's name was Anthony M. Eaton. He was wearing a blazer with polished metal buttons and a Combined Services badge on his breast-pocket, and with his cavalry twills, chukka boots and military tie he looked a typical retired officer. More particularly, he sounded like one. He was undeniably hale and hearty and talkative.

Eaton said he had been in the United States for four years now, having left the Services and gone into the travel business, first in England and later in America. An enthusiastic raconteur, he spoke about the work he said he had done in the past for the British Secret Service. He mentioned how he had crossed into Hungary at the time of the uprising in 1956. When the West failed to help the Hungarians, he said he had become disillusioned and eventually left MI6 in the mid-1960s. Another claim which he made concerned the missiles which the Russians had installed in Cuba after Fidel Castro had come to power. According to Eaton, it was British Intelligence which had first spotted the existence of the missile sites and this information had then been passed to a "friend" in American Intelligence. In fact, this was how President Kennedy had first learned about the dangers sited just ninety miles from the United States coastline.

The confident American interrupted Eaton to say that the Cuban missile story might be relevant to an organisation he had helped set up in Washington. It was a committee to investigate President Kennedy's assassination. Eaton had also taken an interest in the investigation, which publicly challenged the findings of the Government's Warren Commission. More and more people now believed that not only Lee Harvey Oswald but others, including a right-wing faction of the CIA, had been involved in the slaying of President Kennedy.

The reporters began wondering why these two strangers seemed so keen to talk to them. Was the American really a journalist? And who was this man Tony Eaton? Was he really an ex-Intelligence officer and if he were, why was he telling them about Hungary and

Cuba? The only relevance they could see at present to their own enquiries was the emphasis on the fact that links had existed for a very long time between American and British Intelligence and that the presence of right and left-wing "factions" inside Secret Service agencies was the clue which explained certain major historical events. The reporters had only their instincts to go on, but perhaps they were being conditioned to think in a certain way and then apply that thinking to events in Britain.

Courtiour asked Eaton if he, like "Dave", had ever met Peter Bessell. The Englishman remembered that Bessell had caused the British Embassy a headache in Washington once. According to him the British authorities were not happy that the Americans had allowed Bessell to stay permanently in California. "I seem to think his papers once crossed my desk," he remarked vaguely, but he would not elaborate.

Eventually the conversation swung round again to Frederick Cheeseman. Penrose asked Eaton if he had ever heard of Cheeseman and his bizarre tale and the retired RAF officer said he had not. But he suggested he might take a look at the man's military documentation. There were a number of "military types" he could approach and have Cheeseman checked out. He even had friends he had known when he was part of the liaison between British and American Intelligence back in the 1960s.

Courtiour saw no reason why Eaton, whoever he might turn out to be, should not have photocopies of Cheeseman's "military" file. Perhaps he did have good contacts and could assist them in establishing Cheeseman's role once and for all.

Before leaving, Eaton offered to collect them on Sunday, for a special American-style "brunch". He mentioned that a couple of British "Embassy types" might be coming along for the champagne and good food too. The two reporters might even like to stay on in Baltimore for a couple of days: after all, Monday was a public holiday.

By now Courtiour and Penrose were becoming deeply suspicious of Eaton's intentions. They could not understand why a total stranger should invite them to a champagne lunch or a long weekend out of Washington. It all sounded very friendly, but could there be another less charitable explanation for such unsolicited generosity? Were Eaton and his American "journalist" friend simply looking for information from them? And if this was the case, who were they interested in knowing about? Frederick

Cheeseman initially; but also Harold Wilson? And Jeremy Thorpe? The list of people the reporters had met was endless. Since their first meeting with Harold Wilson six months before<sup>3</sup> they had come into possession of a vast store of information, much of it delicate, and the mere fact that a former British Premier was talking to them with astonishing candour, knowing full well that one day they intended to publish, was not unimportant. There were undoubtedly people, including the South Africans and BOSS, who would like to know what Harold Wilson was revealing.

There might be uneasiness in some quarters if it was known that he had spoken to the Director-General of the BBC about his wish for a Royal Commission to look into the Security Services.

But despite their growing misgivings, the reporters decided they would join Eaton for "brunch". As journalists they were not going to miss an opportunity for gathering further information, nor had they any intention of working themselves into a state of paranoia, a condition which they believed they had detected in others they had met in their enquiry. Perhaps they would learn more about Eaton's motives. In particular they wondered who the "Embassy types" might turn out to be. There might be a clue in the company Eaton kept.

On Sunday, therefore, they were ready and waiting when the Englishman arrived to take them to lunch in Alexandria in Virginia. He apologised that his British Embassy friends had not joined them. Unfortunately Gilbert's children had caught a bad dose of influenza and the father had stayed at home.

Afterwards he drove the reporters to Baltimore to his apartment, which was split-level, spacious and tastefully furnished. Eaton explained that he shared it with an ex-CIA employee called Robert Morrow and his girlfriend Pat. Books and pictures were everywhere, and over the fireplace was an original Picasso – at least Eaton claimed it was an original and it certainly looked genuine to Penrose. Against one wall was a wooden rack with several rifles. Close by was a row of photographs in ornate frames. One showed Eaton's flatmate Morrow in an intimate handshaking pose with President Nixon. It was inscribed to "Robert Morrow, a loyal American". Another formal portrait was of Morrow standing with Richard Helms, the man who later became Head of the CIA. There were several other inscribed photographs of Morrow with leading CIA luminaries, and as far as the reporters could tell they were genuine, proud mementoes.

Penrose felt uneasy about the situation into which they had got themselves. Could Tony Eaton really be working for MI6 and "Dave", like his flatmate Robert Morrow, for the CIA? Such an assumption was not altogether absurd. He certainly felt that he and Courtiour were in the hands of a peculiar escort agency of some kind and he did not enjoy the feeling. For one thing he disliked the way their hosts constantly urged them to leave their briefcases in the car or back at the hotel.

"Look, this meeting isn't exactly taking place by accident, is it?" said the reporter suddenly. "Are we being set up for something?"

"I don't know," Eaton replied casually. "What I think you are being set up for is information. You are certainly not being set up to be removed!"

"You are being set up somewhere along the way to be given a hell of a lot of information which I trust you will deal with with a massive amount of salt."

"I think you are being got at by a lot of people who really want the old BBC prestige to rub off on what they are going to say," said Eaton.

"Who is it who will possibly use us then?" asked Penrose.

"They, I suspect, are those good people who really believe they are part of the Commonwealth," Eaton answered, presumably referring to the South Africans. But Penrose was mystified.

"Possibly also people like Kissinger who know how much power and use Britain has. A Britain with Conservative Party people who perhaps actually believe in it." To any outsider Eaton would no doubt have sounded vaguely inebriated but he was talking in deadly earnest. His conversation reminded Penrose of Frederick Cheeseman who also had a tendency to baffle and lose his listener.

"Look, can you tell me what's going on?" demanded the reporter with growing exasperation.

Eaton ignored the question and changed the subject. For some reason he began talking about his visits to Czechoslovakia "for MI6". It so happened that all the places he mentioned, each incident, every hotel, even individual waiters, were instantly recognisable to Penrose from his period there for the *Observer* at the time of the Russian invasion. He had stayed in the same places and remembered the same waiters. The conversation was rambling but decidedly uncanny and rather disturbing. Unless he was mistaken Tony Eaton knew too much about him.

Eaton then made the extraordinary claim that he had been

officially assigned by the Security Services in Whitehall to "keep an eye" on the Keeler-Profumo case. Matters of national security had been involved, including the fact that a Russian diplomat, a KGB agent, was implicated in the scandal. Eaton said he had been "under instructions" to befriend the prostitute who had rocked the Macmillan Government. He even had a postcard from Christine Keeler, he said, to prove this, and showed it to Courtiour. It was a strange story and both reporters wondered why the expatriate Englishman was telling it.

There was one very peculiar coincidence about Eaton's apparent connection with both the Keeler-Profumo affair and the incident of the Cuban missiles. It was a reference which Penrose remembered reading in Harold Macmillan's memoirs, *At the End of the Day*. Stephen Ward, the osteopath who had been involved with Christine Keeler, had apparently acted as intermediary on one occasion between the Russian Embassy and the British Foreign Office: and evidence of Ward's role had been provided to Macmillan at the time by, of all people, Harold Wilson.

Eaton opened a bureau drawer and pulled out a jumble of papers and photographs. Now he passed two photographs to Courtiour, one of which showed a tall man in his late thirties or possibly early forties. His head was long and his ears pointed out at an angle. Eaton said it was a photograph taken many years ago of Hendrik Van den Bergh of BOSS. The other photograph, he explained, showed Van den Bergh's daughter with his own former wife.

Courtior asked if he could make copies of these items and Eaton at once agreed. The reporter could take whatever he wanted. There were envelopes addressed to "A. M. Eaton" from the old War Office in Whitehall. One said simply: "On Her Majesty's Service: A. M. Eaton, Esq, 7 Rosedale Road, Stoneleigh, Surrey. If undelivered, return to:- Room 055, B.I. War Office, Whitehall, London, S.W.1." It was postmarked London, W.1., 6 pm, 12 Sep 1963. Eaton said it had been sent to him, as had the others, when he was working for MI6. He added that Room 055 was the headquarters of the Chief of Military Intelligence at what is now the Ministry of Defence.

Even more intriguing was a silk-covered notebook which was among the material he passed to the reporters. It contained page after page of "Intelligence" contacts. There were the names of MI5 personnel and the address of "HQ Intelligence Centre".

For the reporters the question was really why Eaton was giving

them odd photographs and material in the first place. An old snapshot of South Africa's head of the Bureau for State Security? War Office correspondence? Their experience that afternoon in Baltimore reminded them of their first meetings with Frederick Cheeseman. Penrose later called it the "spook's ceremony" of handing out their identikit bona fide. It was an elaborate ritual but why Eaton was doing it they did not yet know.

Penrose asked if Eaton still followed British politics now that he lived permanently in the United States.

"What we need, of course," answered Eaton, "is the Queen Mother demanding that all the officers who swore allegiance to her husband ought to come back. By Christ, we would take back the country just like that! If it ever happened I'd get on an aircraft back to Britain so damn fast."

"There's no possibility of that ever happening in Britain," said Courtior. He was hoping he might be handed more documents. "Since Cromwell the time has gone."

"No, it hasn't!" said Eaton eagerly. "I think it's coming, it's near. I really do believe it's coming."

Penrose looked across at the man soberly and wondered what he meant.

"It's been described to us," he said, wondering how Eaton would react, "that there could have been a coup in Britain in the early 1960s."

"I don't know who told you that," said Eaton, "but, yes, I would say you had a very good source. It did almost happen."

But a coup by whom in fact?

"If we ever had an officer corps in Britain we never really bragged about it."

"You mean people in uniform . . .?"

"Oh yes, I can give you people and places. It very nearly did happen. If it had been the Queen Mother's wish that it should have occurred, it would have occurred, but she said 'No' very definitely."

"And you're saying it would have worked, succeeded?" said Penrose, looking across at their host suspiciously. Eaton was obviously being serious. Yet what he was saying was clearly preposterous. An armed insurrection by the British Army?

"It would have been very, very quick," the Englishman said, "very thorough. The Queen would have remained Queen."

According to Eaton, a plot had been hatched in high-ranking

military circles in London in the mid-1960s. The coup was to have been directed against Harold Wilson's Labour Government, which had a small majority at the time, he said, and was therefore particularly vulnerable. A coup could have reset the political clock for years to come.

"We just said the Americans are getting too powerful and the Russians are getting in our way . . . A lot of us got tired of the unions at that point. From about 1963 we had the unions telling us how to run things. South Africa had been forced out of the British Commonwealth by Labour politicians like Barbara Castle. We did not want to become members of the Common Market. We did not want to become European and we were getting to the stage where no one was listening to us any more."

"What evidence have you got for all this?" asked Penrose.

"None," replied the ex-RAF man. "Not unless you have four hundred thousand pieces of paper on people's internal telephone lines."

Again Eaton was sounding like Cheeseman at his most obscure.

Eaton even claimed that a small band of top-ranking officers had actually approached Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother with their plan for the coup. He said that with her support, if she had given it, they would have found no real opposition to a military take-over. The Metropolitan Police would not have arrested the Queen Mother. There was also little likelihood that the Home Office would have ordered the Security Services against the plotters. Eventually there would have been a re-establishment of Parliament, but in the meantime there would have been a Royalist Government: an interregnum. If the coup had succeeded, he said, South Africa would have returned to the Commonwealth.

"So why did it not succeed?" asked Penrose, not disguising his disbelief.

"The Queen Mother, being a totally proper Scottish lady, and a highly proper democratic Queen, said: 'Oh no dears, you can't do that.'"

"You're not saying you were present when the plotters went to see the Queen Mother?" Courtiour asked.

"I was standing down at the bottom of the stairs at Clarence House when the officers approached her," said Eaton grimly.

"At Clarence House?" said Courtiour, making sure he had heard Eaton correctly. Clarence House is indeed the Queen Mother's London residence.

"There is this beautiful staircase at Clarence House," Eaton went on. "It comes down both sides of the hall."

"Were you able to see this yourself?" Penrose asked.

Eaton nodded. "When ~~she~~ was presented with the 'Ma'am, will you?' she replied: 'No, my dears, I don't think that's a good idea at all.'"

"And?" said Courtiour, equally sceptically.

"What the hell do you do?" replied Eaton firmly. "You don't do it. It was known by many people at the time." He added that the plan was well known in military circles, of course, and had even reached the ears of a Fleet Street journalist. The man in question was known to have sympathetic right-wing views and good contacts with the Security Services. Eaton went on to list the names of peers who were involved in the plot and of a prominent official with the Joint Intelligence Bureau. A minor member of the Royal Family had also apparently agreed to support the coup.

To the reporters it seemed at the time that the Englishman was simply indulging in a colourful piece of wish-fulfilment three thousand miles away from home. In many ways it sounded like rather pathetic bar-talk, and when Eaton gave Courtiour a calling card which read "The Marquess of Conway de Redonda" that seemed the final straw. (This title, they were later to discover, is listed neither in Debrett's nor in the Almanach de Gotha.)

Although their instinct was to dismiss Eaton as a harmless romanticiser, both reporters recalled that Sir Harold Wilson had briefly mentioned a coup to them at their last meeting before leaving for America. However unlikely the source they both felt it necessary to follow up on Eaton before finally dismissing him from their calculations.

Using the Diplomatic List for 1976, Penrose started to trace Eaton's Embassy contact, the diplomat "Gilbert" who had failed to turn up at their lunch the previous Sunday. He found a Gilbert Owlett listed as Second Secretary (Information) with a home address in the suburb of Falls Church, an area dotted with Pentagon offices. Eaton too had given them an office address where he could be contacted in Leesburg Pike-Falls Church.

Penrose eventually reached Gilbert Owlett later in the week. The diplomat said he was on vacation before returning to London.

Had they not been supposed to meet for lunch the previous Sunday?

"Well I don't know that directly you and I were supposed to

meet," he replied. "But it was said that I was going to accompany Dr Eaton. At the time I didn't know that you and your colleague were going to have lunch. To that extent, yes we were, but totally unknown to me."

Penrose was surprised to hear Tony Eaton mentioned as Dr Eaton. It was the first time he had heard the man had a doctorate of some kind.

"What can I do?" asked Owlett sharply.

"Do you remember when Frederick Cheeseman came into the news? Does that ring a bell?"

"Yes it does," he replied.

"Did it make any impact here in America?"

"What a grossly leading question to ask a member of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service!"

"I just wondered whether the American papers picked it up at the time." A third voice on the line interrupted the conversation and the diplomat told the third man he was talking to Mr Penrose in Suite 404. The man apologised.

"They bug the bloody lines wherever you go," said Owlett laughing.

"When we ring the military here in the United States," said Penrose, "they seem to be very well aware of Frederick Cheeseman." It was the odd replies and interest their questions seemed to provoke. When they rang the South African Embassy in Washington they gained the same impression. Penrose asked Owlett if he could give an explanation for why the military might be responding in such a way.

"Two answers," said Owlett. "No I can't and no I won't. You will have to dig for it. I mean, you know that."

Penrose was further intrigued. Owlett seemed well aware of the Cheeseman story, and yet for some reason was holding back anything he knew. Then again, perhaps the Second Secretary, who dealt with the American media, had simply picked up the story from the British Press.

"How long are you in town?" asked Owlett. "If you want a sort of private word, by all means . . ."

The reporter had been working the conversation round to a meeting, but now the diplomat had suggested it first. He arranged to have lunch with him on Saturday. Owlett wondered if Dr Eaton would be joining them but Penrose said he thought he would not.

"Pity," said the diplomat, "because Tony is a good man on the track in this kind of area."

There was no doubt, said Penrose, that Dr Eaton was exceedingly helpful on the Cheeseman story.

"I have information to the effect that you are no longer working with the BBC?" said Owlett suddenly.

"That is absolutely right," replied Penrose, imagining that Eaton must have discussed them with Owlett earlier.

"When did this date back to?" the diplomat asked.

"That would have been round about August of this year," the reporter answered, feeling for a moment upstaged by the other man's questions.

"I am assuming, of course," said Owlett, "that you got my name from Dr Eaton?"

"Yes we did," Penrose admitted.

"The devil!"

"We saw your name in the Diplomatic List and thought you might be the Gilbert Tony Eaton referred to."

There was a short burst of laughter on the line. "How lucky you were," Owlett said. "How lucky you were."

The conversation with the British diplomat made the reporters reconsider their instinct to dismiss Eaton out of hand. If he was well regarded by members of the Embassy staff in Washington then he was possibly worth a little more of their time.

The reporters took a cab out to the Washington suburb of Falls Church. PHP, the company Eaton had said he worked for, turned out to be a corporation called Preventive Health Program. It occupied Suite 1500 of an expensive skyscraper block. Many of the other tenants seemed more appropriate for the Falls Church military area: several were serving US officers or retired colonels working in communications and electronics.

On the way back to their hotel Penrose and Courtiour discussed the value of making further checks on Tony Eaton. Both felt they needed to find out more about the expatriate Englishman and the work he did in America.

Courtior stopped at a news-stand and bought a copy of the *Washington Star*. The front-page lead story immediately caught his eye. It began: "US integrity is at stake in JFK probe." Underneath was a question-and-answer interview with Bernard Fensterwald, Jr, a Washington lawyer. Fensterwald had represented James McCord during Watergate, and earlier James Earl Ray who was

convicted for the killing of Dr Martin Luther King. According to the newspapers, the lawyer now headed the Committee to Investigate Assassinations. The Committee was a group of private citizens investigating the slayings of President John F. Kennedy and others. Courtiour was reminded of "Dave". He said he had helped to form the Committee. Tony Eaton too had become involved.

One of the points put to Fensterwald by the *Star* was: "The Committee to Investigate Assassinations has long been suspected by some people of being somehow connected with the CIA and you yourself being labeled possibly a CIA agent or CIA plant. Are you in fact a CIA agent of any sort?" The blunt question had been answered with a flat denial: "No, I'm a full-time lawyer. . . . I have no idea where the rumour started."

If the Committee with the unfortunate initials CIA really was CIA, Courtiour argued, who was the American who kept visiting them really working for? But Penrose said it was probably just another coincidence. The lawyer had adamantly denied he had any connection whatsoever with the Intelligence Agency.

Tony Eaton had told the reporters that he was also involved with the Committee to Investigate Assassinations. Again the Englishman seemed to be involved in matters which might possibly involve the Intelligence world.

More disturbing was a news clipping which somehow the reporters had not noticed before. The *Daily Telegraph* article, dated 19 May 1976, had been written by the newspaper's Washington correspondent Nicholas Comfort. Under the headline "Campaign in US to smear MPs", Comfort had written: "Persistent efforts have been made in recent months to discredit leading members of the three major British political parties by planting derogatory stories about them on news agencies in Washington, it was claimed last night.

"'Shortly before Mr Heath lost the Conservative leadership last year someone presented us with an article on Mr Heath which was quite derogatory on the lines of Mr Jeremy Thorpe,' said Dr Edward von Rothkirck, senior editor of Trans-World news agency.

"So far this year his agency and others have been offered similar matter about some eleven MPs, a Conservative, two Liberals and eight Labour."

When Penrose called Dr von Rothkirck he confirmed that the

*Telegraph* article was accurate. He also mentioned the names of the political figures who had been the subject of "smear attacks". Among them he included Harold Wilson, Lady Falkender and Jeremy Thorpe.

"Well, I believe that the really heavy approach was done back in 1975," said the American newsman. "I had a heart attack on 16 January 1976 and I know that what we call the 'derogatory British material' was being offered to us well before Christmas.

"By the way, we're not the only American news agency to have been approached," he said. "There's a man with an agency out in Pennsylvania. He's also been approached with material of this sort." He and other news agencies had become suspicious. Nobody could quite understand why some of the material was offered for nothing. Occasionally complete strangers, some of them British, some South African, would call the agency and ask only for "token payment" for their work. They were far more interested, he said, in knowing their material might go out on the international wire services.

Once he said a man had brought them scurrilous material about the former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson. It was said to include details of his private life. Trans-World had also been given material about Lady Falkender, but the agency had not used it.

He remembered, too, a file which included some letters about Jeremy Thorpe. They had been written to a friend back in 1961 and 1962. Dr von Rothkirck said he had kept photocopies of them and would let Penrose have them. He also had the agency's "In-and-Out" diary: it listed most people who had called or visited Trans-World in recent months.

When the reporters looked at the diary entries they were startled by some of the names: Gordon Winter was mentioned and so too was Tony Eaton. From what Dr von Rothkirck was saying it appeared that Trans-World had been told about the Liberal Party story some five months *before* Scott made his original outburst in court. Penrose and Courtiour went slowly down the entries:

9/17/75 - Mr H. Mueller called at the office. Said he has a friend, Gordon Winter, writing for the Johannesburg Express who has done and is doing some articles on the background of some of the British political leaders. Mueller said Winter has material on Harold Wilson and Jeremy Thorpe. Material in the form of letters, photocopies and affidavits. Wanted to know if

we could use these items and how we would use the material if it was furnished as well as how widely we could get it distributed. I asked what payment was expected. Mueller said that a token payment would be sufficient and the other writers were looking for by-line credit to open the US market for other material.

9/19/75 – Received a call from a Cuban contact whom I have known for many years asking if I would talk to Robert Morrow who was well known to him and who had CIA connections in the past and which relationship might still exist. Called Morrow and had talk with him. Conversation ranged from the assassination of Kennedy, to Cuba, South Africa and British politics. Agreed to meet with him later at a mutually agreed time.

10/10/75 – Received visit from Bob Myers a freelance writer. Myers indicated that he had just returned from Europe and Africa. Wanted to do articles on Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and profiles on English political figures. Claimed to have some “hot stuff”. Showed several letters alleged to have been written by Jeremy Thorpe to a friend in 1961 and 1962. Myers further claimed to have interviewed several people in London who had direct knowledge of the matter and that it could shake the political foundations if the whole story came out. He said, “It in a way is the British Watergate.” Said he could also do one on Harold Wilson and Lady Falkender [sic] and also on the sale of honours. Asked for \$500.00 per article or on a 60-40 basis distribution if we guaranteed distribution via syndication to one hundred papers.

Re Bob Morrow and Eaton: During 1975 and 76 we had numerous calls plus visits from or to Morrow. Morrow arranged on one occasion for a chauffeured trip to the National Democratic Club for lunch where luncheon was arranged with Morrow, Eaton and an unidentified female. A lengthy three-hour conversation ensued covering a wide range of subjects. At one point through a slip Eaton admitted he had been affiliated with MI6. Conversation touched on Thorpe and that he was being neutralised as a political factor. Morrow arranged for a visit with Eaton and myself to the office of Congressman Butler of Virginia to discuss the JFK assassination and that he and Eaton were participating in the investigative process prior to the establishment of the

committee in 1976. Morrow and Eaton wanted to enter into long-range liaison to give us background data on British politics, etc, in return for our feeding them information on the Kennedy assassination and State Department reaction to events in England.

The reporters noticed that the man named “Mueller” had mentioned Gordon Winter when he first approached Trans-World. He had told the agency that Winter was a friend of his. But when Penrose spoke to the Johannesburg-based journalist, Winter claimed that he did not know anybody called Mueller.

“That’s a German name isn’t it?” asked Winter.

The South African journalist had no explanation of why a complete stranger should know about the Scott story months before it became public. Or why he should be aware of Winter’s letters and other material. Winter went on to say that the only people he had passed the information to had been a London Sunday newspaper and British Intelligence. Penrose and Courtiour had since met the man who served as a postbox between Winter and Intelligence. The man had readily confirmed that he had passed Winter’s file to MI5. In fact, however, the Security Services already had their own detailed file on the Liberal leader. Winter, and his London contact, had also said they had both met Tony Eaton.

For the reporters these apparent coincidences suggested that the world was growing remarkably smaller: everybody seemed to know everybody else. Turning back to the Trans-World diary, Courtiour noticed that there were further clues to Eaton’s background. He clearly did not spend all his time working for the Preventive Health Program Corporation.

Courtior was struck by Eaton’s lunchtime “slip” to von Rothkirck that he had been affiliated with MI6. Did real Intelligence agents make such fundamental mistakes? Yet some time later the British Security Services confirmed to the *Observer* that they were aware of Tony Eaton and that he had approached them in the 1960s. They had gone to some pains to stress that he was not working now for MI6 in any capacity. Altogether it appeared to be just another remarkable coincidence that British Intelligence should admit to knowing Eaton in the first place. For one thing people do not apply to join the Secret Service: they are invariably recruited in the most clandestine manner.

The reporters were still no further forward in discovering why

Tony Eaton had passed them information or for whom he was working. Furthermore, had the Englishman's belief that the South Africans would try and use them been based on more than just guesswork?

It was the story which Bob Myers had tried to sell the Washington news agency which most puzzled the reporters. On 10 October 1975 Myers had spoken to von Rothkirck about a "British Watergate". By the reporters' calculations Myers had told his extraordinary story just two weeks before Scott's dog Rinka was shot dead on Exmoor and almost seven months to the day before Jeremy Thorpe's letters to Norman Scott were released by Scotland Yard and made public by Thorpe in the *Sunday Times*.

The reporters knew from Norman Scott how, at the time of the 1971 Liberal Party enquiry, he had tried to get back from Scotland Yard the letters which he had given the police in December 1962. How then had a freelance writer turned up in America offering as evidence for his story letters which only existed in closely guarded official files in Whitehall?

Why had neither Mueller or Myers pressed ahead with publication of the scoops which they had talked to Trans-World about? Why indeed had they wanted only token payment for such scoops? Were the reporters looking at what Sir Harold had referred to as "private agents of various kinds and various qualities" when he first made his allegations about the South Africans.

The Deputy Director of BOSS, Alexander van Wyk, had told the *Johannesburg Sunday Times* that agents for BOSS, worked in many countries including the United States and Britain. Van Wyk admitted that his agents had burgled political opponents' homes and photocopied documents but had added that they were too clever to get caught doing it.

The reporters were struck by the fact that the first approach to Trans-World had been made only weeks after Sir Harold had carpeted his Intelligence Chiefs when it had been confirmed to him that a dissident element within MI5 had been responsible for spreading rumours that there was a Communist cell at Number 10.

Would Sir Harold be able to confirm their suspicion that Thorpe's letters to Norman Scott had come to the freelance writer Bob Myers from official sources? Or was it that the letters had been obtained by a BOSS agent, "freelance" or otherwise, who had displayed the photocopying technique of which Van Wyk had

boasted? What if any was the role of Gordon Winter whose name cropped up yet again in this strange affair? And what of Eaton the Englishman who lived in America and kept photographs of the Head of BOSS handy to show to visiting journalists, if he no longer worked for MI6 as he once claimed to do? Was it possible that he now worked in some capacity for the South Africans?

When Penrose checked again with PHP to discover exactly what Eaton did at the company, he was astonished to find that Gilbert Owlett had left his position as Second Secretary at the British Embassy and that he now worked for the same company as Eaton. Later when Courtiour asked Owlett if he had accompanied his friend Eaton on trips to news agencies the former Embassy man said that it had been part of his job to deal with the media but he had never done so together with Eaton. He had just known Eaton as a journalist Owlett explained, he had seen the man's accreditation as official correspondent for two West Indian papers.

Penrose also talked with Bill Mercer Dayley, a Vice-President of PHP who had just retired as a Colonel in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Mercer Dayley had been Medical Officer at the British Embassy and responsible for liaison with the American Surgeon General. The Vice-President confirmed that Eaton worked for PHP as a consultant in legal and financial matters. Mercer Daley was concerned that PHP should not be held accountable for anything which Eaton had said or done.

While they were in Washington, Penrose decided to make the short journey to New York, where he hoped to meet Senator Hubert Humphrey, who was undergoing medical treatment there, in order to check the information that Harold Wilson had given the reporters just before they left London. But according to *Time* magazine the Senator was very ill. Guards with revolvers and long batons paraded along seemingly endless corridors in the Sloan Memorial Institute; one of them took the reporter up to Room 813. Senator Humphrey had unfortunately had a bad night and was fast asleep. So Penrose wrote a letter on the spot in the annexe room and his secretary promised to read it to the ex-Vice President when he awoke. Penrose said he would contact Mr Humphrey's political office in Washington when he got back to London.

The trip to New York had been something of a disappointment but Courtiour meanwhile had not been wasting his time in Washington. While his colleague was hanging around the Sloan Memorial Institute in New York, he was lunching with Colonel



Fletcher Prouty. Prouty said he was eager to help in any way he could and the conversation ranged from his service with Dulles to his contacts with Robert Morrow. He confirmed that Morrow was an ex-CIA operative and spoke about his own role in the affair of the U2 spy plane which Gary Powers had flown over the Soviet Union in 1960. He remembered the way the plane had been fuelled and that the incident had looked strange at the time because Powers had been carrying means of identification with him. Normally pilots on spy missions carried no identification whatsoever in case they were caught.

To Courtiour, this was another intriguing example of the secret work of intelligence agents which the public never got to hear about. The precise role of men like Gary Powers, and possibly Frederick Cheeseman, was never revealed even when events like the U2 incident became world news.

According to Prouty, Frederick Cheeseman might well turn out to be an American Intelligence agent. It could well be that he was a "CIA package". In the context of South Africa he might have been part of a mission which went wrong. Perhaps the media were never intended to find the man in the first place. Probably once he had been tracked down, the pretence that he was only a "hoaxer" had to be kept going.

It was a theory that Courtiour had already heard from Tony Eaton and from "Dave". Eaton had thought that Cheeseman might work for a small Intelligence agency like the DIA, which he referred to as "a weird and wonderful organisation". With only five thousand employees it occasionally mounted operations that were kept secret from rival agencies like the CIA. Perhaps a Labour Cabinet Minister could ask an American counterpart, someone like the Secretary of State, to find out about South African interference in Britain.

"If you are a Cabinet Minister, you could check these things," he said.

"A check on the South African interference," he explained, "would go from the Cabinet Member probably direct to Kissinger. Kissinger could use the DIA rather than the CIA. Cheeseman would not have been involved that long ago – perhaps three or four years to pop him in again. I have no doubt that he has been up to something pretty odd. To have three nationalities he must have been operating for some time . . . If we accept that the Socialist Party was worried, they had probably made a deal with the

Liberals that they would take the info and pass it on to the Socialists. Then they could, with luck, bag a few South Africans. When you arrived, they had to blow it.

"Somebody in South African Security," Eaton went on, "must have known Cheeseman and given him an OK. Special Services Club – notices on the board. Cheeseman could have been on a small retainer. There would be no point in Cheeseman taking money from the BBC or Fleet Street as he would have to give it back."

Such theories were difficult to follow but did not seem altogether absurd to the two reporters. Cheeseman had first approached the South African Embassy in London shortly after Harold Wilson had returned to 10 Downing Street in March 1974 and he had been overheard by a reliable witness shortly afterwards talking on the telephone to the Zambian High Commission. He had also infiltrated their diplomatic mission and exchanged information with three Zambian officials. Then he had made his approach to the Liberal Party in May 1976 with claims which appeared to substantiate the allegations that Harold Wilson had been making in Parliament.

There were several intriguing aspects of this scenario as far as the reporters' investigation was concerned. One of them was that Harold Wilson had already told the reporters about the specific approach that he had made to the CIA from Downing Street. Another was that Cheeseman's revelations were about the activities of the official South African Security Service, BOSS, rather than about the "South African business interests" at whom the British Prime Minister had pointed. And it was certainly true that Cheeseman had seemed disconcerted when Penrose and Courtiour turned up at his garden gate: he had asked them angrily whether they had "special clearance" and had appeared genuinely concerned to find that his existence was known to the Press.

But the most important suggestion as far as the reporters were concerned was that some kind of "deal" had been made between people inside the British Labour Party and the Liberals. Eaton's idea seemed to be that the Liberals had been offered something in return for passing on Cheeseman's information – information which a Labour Minister, he said, might have asked the Americans to provide. To the reporters Eaton's theory appeared to break down at this point, because why should the Liberals be involved at

all in the transmission of security information between the Americans and a British Minister? According to Edward Heath, Liberal politicians would not normally be granted access to security information. Perhaps the bargain had been the other way round, and the information from Cheeseman and his masters was really given to the Liberals in exchange for some favour which they were providing? But Eaton's thesis, of course, relied on Cheeseman being an agent rather than a hoaxer.

It seemed that Eaton was prepared to go to some lengths to back up his thesis for in December he wrote to Courtiour with the information which he had promised on Cheeseman. He enclosed a reply from the National Personnel Records Centre (Military Personnel Records), addressed to PHP Corporation, which detailed Cheeseman's military career. One entry read that he had been an Infantry Operations and Intelligence Sergeant – a man who was supposed to be a hoaxer.

Courtior too had succeeded in obtaining confirmation that Cheeseman's personnel numbers were genuine. He had definitely served in the USAF. At the Randolph Air Base in Texas they had records showing he was not serving in the United States but at the same time they could find no evidence that he had ever left US military service. Cheeseman was a "computer mystery", said one sergeant at Randolph.

Indeed the reporters felt much of their American trip was a mystery but it raised new and disturbing dimensions to the story. Not only the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe but also Sir Harold and his Political Secretary were the subject of smear stories being promoted by individuals possibly with "official" links. It seemed that they had tumbled into a sleazy world of agents, bluff, and counter-bluff, smear and counter-smear.

Neither reporter felt sure that he could take any more of the casual asides which seemed to be Eaton's stock in trade. If they were being fed by "Dave" and his friends they wanted time to consider the implications of the new material they were gathering. Also they wanted to see the former Prime Minister and get his reaction to the stories of the so-called coup and of the journalists who had been offering American news agencies what Dr von Rothkirck called "hot stuff" on Jeremy Thorpe, himself and his Political Secretary.

On the flight home as they settled into their seats Courtiour read through a copy of a letter they had written from Washington

before inserting it in his files. It was addressed to Sir Harold Wilson via his intermediary Lord (Albert) Murray. "We are tempted to go into detail," it said, "but believe we should continue with the original agreement that we should treat these matters with the greatest confidentiality. Therefore we shall bring you up to date on our return."

## Chapter 26

Courtiour pressed the doorbell at 5 Lord North Street and the policeman on sentry duty nodded a smile at the reporters. He recognised them from their earlier visits to the ex-Prime Minister's London home. Then Sir Harold opened the door and hurried them inside. He appeared pleased to see them and led the way upstairs energetically.

"I read the papers you sent," he said as soon as they reached the landing. "You said you got some rather interesting stuff over there?"

The former Prime Minister was obviously keen to hear about their fact-finding American visit. He wanted to get straight down to business. The reporters had noticed in the past how he rarely wasted time over polite ice-breaking conversation.

Sir Harold stretched himself in his favourite armchair by the Georgian window and quickly lit a cigar, handling it without ceremony as if it were a cigarette. Penrose gained the distinct impression that for once it was their host who wanted a briefing rather than the other way round, and he plunged straight into his account, beginning with Peter Bessell and their trip to California. He explained that the exiled politician had a great many tales to tell which were hitherto unknown, not only about the Scott allegations but also about events which had taken place in a far wider international context. He mentioned that Bessell claimed he had visited Ian Smith secretly when Sir Harold had been Prime Minister. However, for the time being he withheld any mention of the "charades".

Almost as if he anticipated that there was something off-key about their talk with Bessell, Sir Harold asked bluntly: "Did you find him mentally balanced or not?"

"Oh yes," said Courtiour emphatically. Bessell had appeared both logical and sharply intelligent.

"I think the reason he tells so many different stories," said Sir Harold, "is, I guess, that he was bought by somebody. He seems to be contradicting himself all the time."

"I think your assumption that he has been bought by someone is right," replied Penrose.

"He actually says he was working for an Intelligence agency. American. At the time he was an MP."

"That figures," said Sir Harold, sounding pensive but not appearing visibly shocked by what he had just been told.

If he knew which American agency would have been likely to employ Bessell, he did not say. Nor did he say whether this new information completely wiped out the suggestion he had made at an earlier meeting that Bessell might have been recruited by the South Africans.

The reporters went on and talked about the close relationship which had grown up over the months on the trans-Atlantic telephone. They explained that, with no other Press men around, Bessell had spoken freely and with apparent candour. At times the picture he had presented of himself was hardly flattering. But they consciously did not tell Sir Harold that the ex-MP had spoken in detail about alleged murder attempts on Norman Scott's life. For one thing they were uncertain how such alarming news would be taken. More importantly, they were no longer confident that the former Prime Minister had been altogether frank with them.

"Is he a poor man or not?" Sir Harold cut in to ask.

"He lives very frugally," said Penrose.

Talk of spies and Intelligence networks swung the conversation round to the reporters' subsequent experiences in Washington. They spoke about the odd incidents which had occurred time and again while they were there. In some ways Tony Eaton seemed the most relevant person to talk about. He was the man who had suddenly and strangely produced a photograph of General Van den Bergh plus "Intelligence" information and other material relating to South Africa, and he had also taken a keen interest in Frederick Cheeseman.

The reporters confessed that they had become very suspicious of the interest which had been shown in them.

Courtiour handed over the material which Eaton had presented them in the Baltimore apartment. Sir Harold looked carefully through the papers and photographs.

"Who does he work for: any of the agencies?" he enquired.

The reporters did not know and they said so plainly.

Altogether Eaton reminded them of Frederick Cheeseman. Penrose recalled that it was Sir Harold, of course, who had

suggested once to them that Cheeseman might well turn out to be a "non-admitted" person. An "agent" no agency would ever admit having employed. In Washington it had been suggested by<sup>3</sup> an ex-CIA employee that Cheeseman had possibly been provided with a deliberately misleading, not to say bizarre, "identity". Such a theory partly explained how Cheeseman had acquired his files of documents, "proving" that he had been born in England, the United States and Canada; and had served at different levels in the armed forces of three major allied powers.

The suggestion that Cheeseman, and Eaton, were "contract" agents could not be entirely discounted. By using what Colonel Fletcher Prouty had called a "CIA package" the Americans might well have penetrated BOSS. The United States undoubtedly wanted information about an important sphere of influence, but it could not risk a major diplomatic upset with South Africa. The CIA and DIA could not therefore employ a known staff agent to infiltrate an ally's Intelligence Service. It had been explained to the reporters in Washington that the Americans could well have used a "non-admitted" person like Frederick Cheeseman. Against the fast-changing background of Southern Africa there were no doubt many things the American Security Services would like to know about their opposite numbers in Pretoria. BOSS was a prime target especially of the United States, and the then Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had considered the South African agency out of step with political realities in that troubled sub-continent.

Nothing the reporters had learned in Washington had clashed with Harold Wilson's original suggestion that Cheeseman might turn out to be a "non-admitted" agent. Perhaps Eaton fell into the same kind of category. In the event of unwelcome publicity, as in the Cheeseman case, such men could be wholly disowned once they had served their covert purpose. In the twilight world of Intelligence it seemed anything was possible, a world that had clearly troubled a British Prime Minister.

Sir Harold asked what else Eaton had talked about in the United States.

The reporters wanted to broach the subject of the so-called military coup – it was such a tricky, seemingly absurd tale. Yet at the same time they both remembered that it was Sir Harold who had briefly referred to a British "coup". He had said in passing in June that Lord Cudlipp might have something interesting to say on the subject in a forthcoming book.

Penrose said, somewhat nervously, "This man Eaton spoke of a coup. It may have been utter nonsense, and disinformation, but . . ."

"This is when I took the mercenaries seriously," said Sir Harold, picking up the theme immediately. He showed more concern than surprise. "One always thought that if one could hire mercenaries it wouldn't be difficult to have a couple of thousand men in Horse Guards. It could do an awful lot of damage before the troops came in. If the troops came. They would but all the same."

Courtiour and Penrose were both astonished at what they had just heard. From what he had said to them the coup story could not, then, be entirely discounted it seemed. But did Sir Harold have information that such a conspiracy might have existed? Could such a plot have been discussed in the past? Was it absurd?

"It does surprise me," Sir Harold said. "But I don't think it necessarily absurd."

"Of course, we can be in the position of being misled by people," the reporter continued, as if thinking aloud. "Disinformation . . ."

"Yes, to walk into a trap," said Sir Harold agreeing.

Courtiour's thoughts turned to Hugh Cudlipp's book. As far as he could tell there was no real mention of a coup, rather only a passing reference to a curious meeting which Cudlipp had helped to bring about at Lord Mountbatten's London home in Kinnerton Street on 8 May 1968. It had taken place right in the middle of a national economic crisis and had also been attended by Sir Solly Zuckerman, who had been Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence.

When Courtiour contacted Hugh Cudlipp at the House of Lords, the ex-newspaper executive stood by his written recollection of events. Cudlipp had accompanied his former boss, Cecil Harmsworth King, that afternoon. King, then a director of the Bank of England and Chairman of IPC, had a powerful voice in the running of several newspapers including the *Daily Mirror*, the *Sunday Mirror* and the *People*. Although the Labour Prime Minister had offered him political office three times, Cecil King had preferred, he said, to remain an observer.

According to Cudlipp, however, King was an extremely active observer and had watched Britain's declining fortunes with growing alarm. In discussions with Cudlipp he had not ruled out the possibility of what he called an "Emergency" Government taking

over from Harold Wilson's properly elected administration. In his account of the meeting at Kinnerton Street, Cudlipp had written:

[King] explained that in the crisis he foresaw as being just around the corner the Government would disintegrate, there would be bloodshed in the streets, the armed forces would be involved. The people would be looking to somebody like Lord Mountbatten as the titular head of a new administration, somebody renowned as a leader of men who would be capable, backed by the best brains and administrators in the land, to restore public confidence. He ended with a question to Mountbatten – would he agree to be the titular head of a new administration in such circumstances?

Mountbatten turned to his friend: "Solly, you haven't said a word so far. What do you think of all this?"

Sir Solly rose, walked to the door, opened it, and then made this statement: "This is rank treachery. All this talk of machine guns at street corners is appalling. I am a public servant, and will have nothing to do with it. Nor should you, Dickie." Mountbatten expressed his agreement and Sir Solly departed.

Cudlipp had gone on to add: "Two days later Cecil King announced on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* that Mr Wilson and his Government had lost all credibility, all authority and demanded a fresh start under a new leader." Three weeks later King was sacked as Chairman of IPC and Harold Wilson's Government was to survive the national calamity which had been forecast.

Nevertheless the memory of that particular meeting had not faded in some quarters. One ex-Labour Minister told Penrose and Courtiour that he had been specifically informed that "military figures" had been waiting in the wings at the time of the Kinnerton Street meeting in May 1968. He believed it could well have preceded an all-out coup to replace the Wilson Government. Moreover, it was not the only time that the country faced the prospect of a military take-over.

Harold Wilson had first heard about the Mountbatten-King conversation in detail on 11 February 1976, almost nine years after it had taken place. Shortly before he left Number 10, the Prime Minister had met Lord Zuckerman at a luncheon given by the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee. Lord Zuckerman had

mentioned the forthcoming Cudlipp book to him and said in confidence there would be a reference to the Kinnerton Street meeting. The Prime Minister had listened intently as he heard talk about possible machine-guns being placed in London streets. In the crowd of people at the Savoy Hotel that day he looked for his Political Secretary and told her the news.

"When he heard it he was absolutely bursting with it," Lady Falkender told the two reporters. "He had had it confirmed, so to speak, in detail."

Somehow Lady Falkender had gained the impression that other meetings had taken place in the mid-1960s, one of them at the Defence Department itself. She had heard there was a map of the United Kingdom and people present went over the move for a coup with a pointer. One meeting had been particularly lengthy and plans had been discussed for the way a possible coup would be started.

Lady Falkender had already described how the possibility of a coup had been discussed at Number 10. "If I had to say which period do I think that we talked about the guns most of all I would say the period just after devaluation." The devaluation of the pound had taken place on 18 November 1967.

"Don't you find it extraordinary that the Prime Minister should learn such a story so many years after the event?" Lady Falkender had asked the reporters. "Harold had heard rumours from a variety of sources but they had been half-joking and had never actually been confirmed before. It was really only when Zuckerman volunteered to confirm the story that he really knew."

When the reporters discussed the matter with Sir Harold, he suggested they should talk to Lord Zuckerman. It was possible, he said, that Solly [Zuckerman] himself might disclose what had been discussed at that special meeting with Lord Mountbatten. He would certainly be interested to know anything they might discover.

When Courtiour phoned Lord Zuckerman he eventually agreed that he had used the word "treason" and had stormed out of the house.

"I think I ought to tell you that this conversation is being monitored by the Cabinet Office," he said, without offering an explanation of what he meant.

Afterwards when Lord Zuckerman met the reporters at the Cabinet Office, he glanced at Hugh Cudlipp's book to refresh his

memory and said he agreed with his account of the controversial meeting. It was Cecil King he said who had made all the running. As far as he was concerned he had no knowledge of a military coup?

"But why had Lord Mountbatten and Cecil King met in the first place?" Courtiour inquired.

"You'd better ask them," replied Zuckerman bluntly. "Are you suggesting that anybody in Defence was implicated?"

"No," said Penrose. "But it would seem that others, like the former Prime Minister, were concerned about such meetings."

"He knew more than I did," said Zuckerman, refusing to elaborate.

Courtior asked Lord Zuckerman if he had gained the impression that an "Emergency" Government might have been brought in and backed by military force.

"I didn't imagine it would be brought in by the Salvation Army," he replied sharply. "But in any case I walked out of the meeting in anger."

Cecil King did not agree with Hugh Cudlipp's recollection of the Kinnerton Street meeting. As far as he was concerned it had been arranged by others. He certainly had had no ambitions to bring about an "Emergency" Government. But like his wife, Dame Ruth, he would not deny that influential people had spoken of military coups in the 1960s. He always insisted, he had said, in having no part in them. He had been led to believe in May 1968 that the Queen had received so many petitions about the Prime Minister and other top Labour Ministers that she had turned to her uncle, Lord Mountbatten, for advice. In turn he had spoken to a number of influential people to seek their opinion.

The reporters could not discover exactly why Cecil King and Hugh Cudlipp had met Lord Mountbatten and Solly Zuckerman in May 1968. But there was little doubt that such meetings had sown seeds of suspicion in some political circles. For one thing it created a bevy of rumours at Number 10 itself.

Penrose found the telephone number of a former Head of the Secret Service and called him at his home in the country. Traditionally in Britain such men do not talk with outsiders, let alone journalists. On this occasion the reporter made no secret of the fact that he and his colleague had been meeting the ex-Prime Minister and discussing sensitive matters like national security. The official sounded flabbergasted, even horrified at the idea, and at once agreed they could meet.

The former Secret Service official was a man of few words.

The reporters sketched in some of the background of their investigation, but they were careful not to say too much.

For the moment, however, the retired official seemed more concerned that a former Prime Minister should have spoken so openly to two journalists.

"I doubt very much whether you'll ever be charged under the Official Secrets Act," he explained with annoyance, "because you have learned things from a former Prime Minister. It really is quite disgraceful."

Penrose explained why the ex-Prime Minister felt he wanted a Royal Commission to examine the accountability of the Security Services. He mentioned too Sir Harold's fears about the South Africans. The official agreed that the South Africans did, of course, interfere in British political life, but he added that many other nations were similarly engaged in such espionage.

The reporters turned their questions to the threat posed in the past by possible military coups in Britain. They had been told that such plans had been discussed in certain political circles and had been thwarted, once by the direct intervention of the Secret Service itself.

It would appear, suggested the reporters as gently as they could, that the former Prime Minister had not always been fully informed by his Secret Service. After all, the official had once had the right of direct access to the Prime Minister. If there had been the threat of a coup, however remote, surely he could have spoken about it to Number 10. Why had Sir Harold apparently been left in the dark on occasion?

At first the official said he resented any suggestion that the Secret Service had not fulfilled their duty in the past. Their responsibility was to the Home Office and the Home Secretary. The guide lines had long been laid down and in his opinion they worked. He agreed that he had had the right of direct access to the Prime Minister, but he had rarely used that privilege. In view of Sir Harold's later suspicions, Courtiour asked, would it not have been better if such important matters had been raised with him directly? It would seem that the Prime Minister had learned of possible military take-overs from rumours which reached Number 10.

"You can't go round to ministers every time there's been loose talk by gin-sodden generals," the retired official said rather bitterly.

Would he not concede the point that such stories would be better coming from the Secret Service and not in the form of rumours, Penrose asked again.

"I give you the same answer as before," he replied at once. "It goes to the Home Secretary. I won't go into the details."

Courtiour was not satisfied with the reply and said so. The official appeared to be agreeing that there had been the possibility of a coup.

"One has to use one's judgment," he said. "One's judgment has to take into account how serious the threat of a coup is."

"Was there a serious threat of a coup d'état in the 1960s?" Penrose asked firmly.

"No answer," replied the official equally firmly.

"It's been described to us that on two occasions at least there have been fears of a coup in this country," said the reporter. "Is this something we can discount or not?"

"I am not willing to disclose such information," answered the man.

"We would be right in thinking that MI5 kept the Home Secretary and the Home Office fully informed?" said Penrose. "Would we be barking up the wrong tree in thinking it was the Security Service who failed to communicate information to the Prime Minister?"

"We certainly didn't communicate to the Prime Minister directly," he replied. "No."

"But the Service communicated any information it had about a coup d'état to the Home Office?" the reporter pressed.

"Certainly," said the official at once.

"Would that have been done eyeball-to-eyeball with the Home Secretary?" Penrose enquired. "Or is there a department which supplies the Home Secretary?"

"If it were serious it would be done eyeball-to-eyeball of course," said the man.

"Therefore we can conclude then there obviously were eyeball-to-eyeball meetings whereby the situation was discussed?"

"Assume that if you wish," he replied somewhat uneasily.

The ex-Security chief was making it plain that his department had kept the Home Office fully informed in the past. If the Home Secretary had not passed such information to the Prime Minister this was no fault of the Security Services. The Home Secretary at the time in question had been the present Prime Minister, James

Callaghan. Surely Callaghan would have kept Wilson fully informed of a possible military take-over, even if such a plan had been thwarted?

"I don't go about criticising ministers," said the official pointedly.

"Is it not a bad thing if the Prime Minister does not know about all this until many years later?" asked Penrose once more.

"No comment," answered the official, sinking back into his customary silence.

"Your 'no comments' in fact seem to be suggesting that the coup really was a threat at one stage?" enquired Penrose, not expecting a reply.

"I haven't expressed a view on the seriousness of the coup," said the man gruffly.

"You seem to accept there was certainly talk of a coup?" said the reporter quickly.

"I think it is generally accepted," said the official. "Yes."

It may be accepted by some people, thought Courtiour, but not by some fifty-five million people who have had no idea any such plan was ever considered. Whether by "gin-sodden generals" or others who were completely sober.

"But, of course, there was no coup," volunteered the official. "That perhaps is the most important fact."

Before leaving the former spy chief that afternoon he suggested to the reporters that in the "national interest" they would be better not to publish what they had learned from the ex-Prime Minister. Courtiour replied that others had been equally convinced that what they had learned should be published.

Harold Wilson, he said, was one person who wanted the facts to be brought out into the open. He had told the reporters repeatedly that he was particularly concerned about the recent conduct of the British Security Services. He was convinced that it was in the national interest for any disloyalty to be exposed.

"I am not certain that for the last eight months when I was Prime Minister I knew what was happening, fully, in security," Sir Harold had told them with obvious annoyance and not for the first time.

For the moment however, the reporters continued to concentrate on facts. They wanted to build up a picture of the Cabinet Office shortly before Sir Harold's departure from the Premiership. From his allegations about the British Secret Service, and his suspicions that foreign spies might have been active round his

entourage, it was becoming increasingly clear that the atmosphere at Number 10 was particularly strained in his final months of power. At the very least it was hardly an atmosphere conducive to sound government. If the Prime Minister felt he could not altogether trust MI5, which government body could he then wholly trust?

In any event the atmosphere around 10 Downing Street in Harold Wilson's final days would hardly seem entirely conducive to *good* government. Wrapped in a cocoon of suspicion and doubt about some officials' loyalty, the Prime Minister had been distracted from his main task of governing.

From their extensive enquiries elsewhere in Whitehall the reporters had learned of other factors which had affected Sir Harold's final days in power. For example, they had heard from extremely reliable sources that a very senior MI5 official had been accused of defecting ideologically to the Communists. Sir Harold had in time confirmed that such an accusation had been made. The suspect MI5 man had eventually been cleared of the charges against him on what was described to them as a "technicality", that there had been no firm evidence that the official had ever passed secrets to the Russian KGB. Nevertheless confidence had been shaken and the official had left the Secret Service for a premature retirement.

When the Labour Premier had been informed that the enquiry had taken place he had been greatly disturbed by its extremely serious implications. But he had also been annoyed that at a time when his Cabinet Office had been accused of containing a "Communist cell" MI5 itself was suspected of having a highly placed Russian spy in its midst.

When Courtiour and Penrose had learned of the hitherto undisclosed enquiry they discussed its possible ramifications. If the British Secret Service suspected they had had an important traitor in their ranks, another Kim Philby, this had alarming prospects for any British Government.

The MI5 official was not the only person suspected of being a "spy". Some leading members of the Prime Minister's personal staff shared Sir Harold's belief that they might have a "traitor" among themselves. In the final months of 1975 there was a growing suspicion that a well-placed person could well be plotting against the Labour Administration. A person with direct access to State secrets and to whatever skeletons might be at Downing Street.

Information had reached Harold Wilson which suggested that "traitors" from the Communist Left, as well as the political Right, had infiltrated his extensive entourage. Those he had suspected might have been right-wing spies he had checked by his own secret approaches to the CIA.

Lady Falkender told the reporters about a high-ranking Government official, closely associated with the former Prime Minister for many years, who was suspected of being the so-called "fourth man": the traitor who had fed information to the KGB double-agent Kim Philby before he disappeared from Beirut in 1963. According to Lady Falkender Sir Harold had now been given the identity of the man who was under suspicion. He was thought to have been recruited by the Soviet Intelligence Service while a young student at Cambridge, like the 1950s defectors Burgess and Maclean.

"When Harold told me the name," said Lady Falkender, "we looked at each other seriously and asked ourselves: 'If he is the fourth man can we even trust each other now?'"

Both the former Prime Minister and his Political Secretary were anxious about the huge political scandal which would follow if the man was "unmasked". Sir Harold had consistently helped the man in his career and Lady Falkender gave other reasons why the affair could be damaging for the present Labour Government.

Courtior asked the name of the civil servant whose loyalty had come into question. Lady Falkender said she could not give it. But she did eventually provide some clues and write down an initial. Once the reporter had worked out the correct identity he realised immediately why she and Harold Wilson were so concerned. He wondered too whether their fears about the "fourth man" might partly explain the origin of the "Communist cell at Number 10" story. If the Security Services suspected such a highly placed spy, they might also suspect the Prime Minister who had helped get him his highly sensitive position. Moreover, Sir Harold had been warned by close colleagues not to appoint the man, but he had chosen to ignore their advice.

Shortly afterwards the reporters had further confirmation that the official was indeed under suspicion in Whitehall. A former Labour Minister told them that such rumours had now reached the close circle of senior civil servants at the Treasury, Foreign Office and other key departments. A political scandal could well be imminent and there was a possibility that it might damage the reputation of the former Labour Prime Minister.



Courtiour put in a request to meet the official. The man agreed to meet the reporters in the Cabinet Office. At the start of their meeting the official spoke for several minutes about working in Whitehall, until Penrose swung the conversation round to the real object of their visit.

Had he heard that he was suspected of being the "fourth man", the reporter asked hesitantly, the man who had fed information to Philby before he escaped to Moscow. It was a bizarre question, but the official at once answered. Courtiour was puzzled by this reaction; he thought he and his colleague might be asked to leave the Cabinet Office.

"Let's look at the practicalities," said the man. "Now when was Philby? 1963. Let's get the timing right. No, it just couldn't have been me."

"Is this the first time the question has ever been raised?" Penrose asked.

"Yes," said the man at once. "Absolutely. It really is."

The meeting lasted for another twenty minutes. At times the reporters wondered why they had bothered to approach the man. If their sources had not been who they were, they would probably not have set up the meeting. Walking back towards Whitehall Courtiour wondered if the rumours which had reached Lady Falkender were not just part of the anti-Labour smears which Sir Harold had complained so bitterly about to them.

The former Prime Minister had repeatedly told the reporters that a "mafia group of MI5" with close contacts with the right-wing Press had continued a vicious vendetta against the Labour Government. He had cited several examples, some of them he said important, others less so. He had returned, for example, to the suggestion in the Press that Lady Falkender had not been "positive vetted". This gave the impression he said that she was a potential security risk which was not true. In fact, she had been cleared by the Security Services in his last administration.

The reporters examined a letter which had been sent to Lady Falkender by Robert Armstrong, then Principal Private Secretary at Number 10. The letter, dated 1 May 1974, said: "I had been intending to have a word with you about your own position. Your positive vetting ought to be reviewed sometime! But there is no tearing hurry. It is less than five years since the last review. (Five years being the standard period between reviews.) So I thought it would wait until you were back."

Lady Falkender was among those who did not dismiss the notion that a traitor existed at Number 10. At one of their visits to her home she had explained to the reporters why she could not rule out such a possibility. In particular she thought that malevolent hands had certainly been at work in the long-running Scott affair. The traitor could well be using that potential skeleton to shake and de-stabilise the elected British Government. In the autumn of 1975, months before the general public knew anything about the case, that story's long shadow had stretched right into 10 Downing Street; into the Prime Minister's office itself. After years of watching the affair grow, its tendrils curling tighter around several leading personalities, the "traitor" was ready, Lady Falkender believed, to watch the final act of the "tragedy" take place. The Scott story could now be brought out into the open. And its effects brought into the accusing glare of publicity.

"They were ready," said Lady Falkender angrily, referring to the people behind the suspected "traitor" in the Cabinet Office. "By the autumn of 1975 they were ready. They wanted Norman Scott to be prosecuted. He had been persuaded or he had been set up."

The anti-Labour campaign against Harold Wilson's Government existed on several levels she said. But it was in the Jeremy Thorpe area that the political consequences were seen to be especially virulent. The Prime Minister was vulnerable in that arena and this fact was recognised by some of his closest advisers. More importantly for them, they were convinced that those facts were also known by his enemies. Lady Falkender described some of the protective measures which had been taken to combat the campaign she and others saw being used against them.

By the latter half of 1975 mischievous stories against Jeremy Thorpe were reaching their ears in Downing Street. The Liberal leader was known to be a close friend of the Prime Minister. He had also at times been an important political ally in the House of Commons. His Party's support was increasingly keeping the Labour Government in power. The Tories were only too aware that the Liberals were preventing them from taking over from the Socialists at Westminster. It was in this atmosphere that Harold Wilson and Lady Falkender turned worried glances at the whispering campaign they heard against Jeremy Thorpe. They began making discreet enquiries about the case. Although some Labour Ministers had known about its existence for years they wanted more

information. No longer completely trusting some of the usual channels for information, including MI5, they began delving into the affair themselves. Another Cabinet Minister, Barbara Castle, was urged to help them. She detailed a personal aide to help make confidential enquiries in the Department of Health and Social Security. Others were sent off to discover how the Thorpe story was being loaded for possible use against the Labour Government. It was a case of all hands to the breach.

"I was not trying to prove whether Jeremy was innocent or guilty," said Lady Falkender rather defiantly. "I wanted to find out how much truth there was in all these stories that had been percolating through to Number 10. It was a matter of trying to sort out the whole thing. To see if perhaps there was something in it whereby you could save Jeremy's skin."

From Lady Falkender it was clear that other political skins were also at risk at the time. The reporters were now aware that over the years the Thorpe-Scott saga had left behind a trail of potentially dangerous debris. A collection of people had sullied their hands in one way or another. It was now a fact of growing concern to the Prime Minister himself. So far it had been kept a tight secret from the electorate. By 1975 it was no longer simple to keep the matter behind closed doors. There was even a possibility that it could seep under the Prime Minister's door and ensnare him as it had others in the past. The Government could be at risk too.

Moreover, such a private crisis had come at a time when Britain faced her worst economic plight since the war. The Prime Minister had vast overseas problems to tackle urgently. There were Great Britain's responsibilities in Southern Africa. The secrets which his close staff believed could be employed against him were also known by his enemies. And Harold Wilson's list of "enemies", he believed, was growing. From possible elements in the CIA, to BOSS, and a dissident faction of MI5. To say nothing of a select band of politicians at Westminster. Guns were thought to be turning in all kinds of directions in the final days of Harold Wilson at Number 10.

## Chapter 27

On Tuesday 22 March 1977 Penrose and Courtiour arrived at Wyndham Mews carrying three leather bags and a brown suitcase. Peggy Field opened the front door and showed the reporters into the elegant drawing-room.

While Courtiour unpacked files from their folders, Penrose began explaining to Lady Falkender the real purpose behind their visit that morning. In the past they had kept Sir Harold informed of their main enquiry, but more recently they had held back certain elements of the story from him. It was partly a question of his time, the reporter said, but it was also because of the nature of some of the material. Lady Falkender looked across at the reporters rather apprehensively.

Courtior said that he and Penrose wanted her to examine their files and then pass on a summary to the ex-Prime Minister. He said again that they had agreed to keep Sir Harold informed of *everything* they had learned. It was, of course, part of the agreement they had struck at Lord North Street with him the previous May. Courtiour hoped he did not sound too much like a Boy Scout and he said as much. Yet the reporters had good reason to be cautious. Just what would the former Prime Minister make of Peter Bessell's testimony, and Norman Scott's documents.

"I understand," said Lady Falkender rather crisply. "You'd like to use me as some kind of buffer." She smiled briefly and then her expression became serious once more.

"I think for once we really do need a 'buffer'," replied Penrose, thinking that was exactly why Sir Harold's Political Secretary might prove so useful. He went on to explain that some of the material which had come out of their work seemed to fly in the face of Sir Harold's theory about South Africa. Certainly where it related to the Scott-Thorpe story, he added quickly.

"Harold certainly won't be happy to hear that," Lady Falkender agreed.

Courtior handed her a copy of Scott's 1962 police statement. She said she had not seen it before and as far as she knew neither

had Sir Harold. She read through it slowly and made no comment. Peggy Field reached over and took the statement from her sister. Scott's police statement, Courtiour explained, was one of the least offensive parts of the whole story. More important was the fact that people had wanted and actively planned Scott's murder. They were convinced that attempts had been made to kill Scott.

"Harold's eyelashes would have dropped off if he had seen this," said Lady Falkender, widening her expression as she handed back the police statement. "If he heard what you were saying he would stand with his back to the wall like a wounded stag."

The sisters read through the small mountain of files piled on the carpet and occasionally the reporters read a significant passage aloud. Penrose told them about a man who had spoken with Peter Bessell. Lady Falkender had known the former MP at Westminster and had then liked him. Now she did not know if she altogether trusted him.

According to Peter Bessell, said Penrose, the man had contacted him saying he had special knowledge of Norman Scott and the dog-in-the-fog case. He told Bessell that not only did he know some of the background, but he was also involved himself. Bessell listened to the story and pressed for more detailed proof. Bessell claimed he had made tape-recordings of the story he was hearing. Indeed he had confirmed that tapes existed in the *aide-mémoire* he had subsequently lodged with his London lawyers.

Penrose read from the notes on his lap. "I had asked him if he had held anything back?" Bessell had told the reporters in Oceanside. "For a moment he had said nothing. Then he added: 'All right, Newton was hired to kill Scott.'" Bessell claimed he had then replied at once: "Oh Christ." He had imagined that all such ideas had been abandoned years ago.

Lady Falkender sat motionless in her rocking chair. Peggy Field shook her head in apparent disbelief. Penrose continued reading from the Bessell file.

According to the ex-MP, he had then asked the man if he made a habit of meeting hired killers, even by accident. The man would not explain exactly how and where he had hired the civil aviation pilot to kill Scott. Bessell then claimed he said angrily: "I am appalled. I never thought you would be a party to that." The retired politician had added: "The man told me that Newton had done several 'jobs' in the past. He thought nothing of it and found it a useful way to supplement his income."

"You can't be serious," said Lady Falkender rather unconvincingly. It was now late into the evening and she was far less incredulous than she had been at the beginning of their conversation that day.

Penrose found his place again and went on recounting what Bessell had claimed had been said. He had asked the man how much his "income had been supplemented" by the Scott assignment. The man replied without hesitation: "£5,000."

The reporters explained that their suspicions had been aroused, not only by Peter Bessell, but other people they had met. Courtiour listed the people they had interviewed and what they had been told. There was little doubt in their minds that people had tried to murder Scott. It was an assertion they repeated several times that evening. In any event it was now abundantly clear that there was far more to the incident on Exmoor than killing Scott's dog Rinka. The sisters agreed at once. From their own observations at Number 10 they were fully aware that Norman Scott had become a political problem.

"If Sir Harold knew about all this . . ." said Lady Falkender, turning back to the file in front of her, "he would . . ." She stopped herself in mid-sentence and went on reading what Bessell had told the reporters.

Minutes later she broke the silence which had filled the room again. She said that she wanted to make it clear that Sir Harold had, of course, no inkling that such things had been going on. She added that if everything she had learned was true, or even part of it, it still did not rule out that the South Africans had been involved in some way.

"How I shall tell him all this I really do not know," she said, smiling nervously. Courtiour said that was precisely why they had approached her with the problem.

Penrose snapped the Bessell file shut. It had already taken four hours to go through the Bessell material and they still had not finished reading everything. Guessing that his colleague thought it the right moment to change the subject, Courtiour reached into the suitcase and pulled out another file. Peter Bessell's testimony had created a disturbing tension in the room. The reporters could understand the impact a former Parliamentary colleague was having on Lady Falkender and her sister. It was not every day that an ex-Prime Minister's Political Secretary heard such extraordinary allegations.

"You realise, of course, that my job is to protect Harold from all this," she said suddenly. "People will draw all kinds of conclusions when this is published and most of them will be the wrong ones. He'll be shocked to the core when he hears this. There's no telling what he might do at the House of Commons."

After their marathon fifteen-hour meeting at Wyndham Mews on 22 March, the reporters wondered how the former Prime Minister would react to the dark news they had left behind with his Political Secretary. They had described their latest findings to Lady Falkender in vivid and unequivocal detail, after she had promised to pass on the information to Sir Harold the following day. She would tell him that Norman Scott had been taken to the moors on the evening of 24 October 1975 to be cold-bloodedly murdered. The reporters had made it abundantly clear that there had been much more lying behind the Exmoor shooting than a trivial incident centred around a dead dog. Whoever's finger had been on the trigger that particular night, it had in their view been part of a planned assassination attempt. Sir Harold would now know that there was far more to the whole story than a complicated foreign plot hatched in Pretoria. Yet in their conversations with Lady Falkender, Courtiour and Penrose had by no means discounted the sinister roles which South Africans and others had played out behind the scenes. They had passed to him the evidence they had discovered.

The reporters had fortunately found it unnecessary to spell out the political implications of what they had recently discovered. Lady Falkender had intuitively realised that for the former Prime Minister they were both serious and far-reaching. She feared now that some people might misunderstand Sir Harold's original motives for sparking off the reporters' special investigation. After all, she argued, the fact that one of his journalistic leads had led to what amounted to a private murder enquiry was something he could not possibly have foreseen.

Far more, of course, had come out of their work than the complicated details of this long-running Scott story. A story which had been set in motion seventeen years before and yet continued to create problems for people on very different rungs of the social ladder.

Lady Falkender then told the reporters candidly that the date of Sir Harold's surprise resignation had been inextricably linked to the announcement that the royal marriage between Princess

Margaret and Lord Snowdon was officially at an end. Exactly why the former Labour Prime Minister had originally agreed to help the Royal Family, at an admittedly difficult moment for the Queen, she was not altogether certain. Yet she now readily conceded that the Palace might probably have played an equally crucial role in the timing of Andrew Newton's trial in the same week of March 1976. For apparently different motives, she agreed, Buckingham Palace and Downing Street had taken the closest interest in exactly the same problems and events. On this occasion the reporters could be reasonably certain that the element of coincidence had not really entered the story.

On Tuesday 9 December 1975, the day the Prime Minister had formally informed the Queen of his decision to resign, the matter of timing had been raised at Buckingham Palace. When Sir Harold heard about the Royal Family's domestic problem he had, according to Lady Falkender, said: "Well, Ma'am, do you think this would help?" The Prime Minister had then offered to time his resignation announcement with the news that Princess Margaret's sixteen-year marriage had ended, hoping to draw most of the resulting publicity. Lady Falkender had been furious on hearing from Sir Harold what had been said at Buckingham Palace and she had not kept her opinions to herself.

"When I heard he had actually said: 'Well, Ma'am, do you think this would help?' I then said to Harold: 'Well, she must have been terribly pleased.'" Lady Falkender did not disguise the cynicism in her voice. "'No,' he said, 'she was completely taken by surprise.' I remember saying: 'You must be joking.' Harold looked at me quite shocked and said: 'You don't understand about them.' I remember saying: 'I understand one thing about the Palace. We may know how to operate here at Downing Street, but we are absolute amateurs because *they* really operate.'"

Lady Falkender had told the reporters that as far as she was aware Sir Harold had not then known about the coming Newton trial or its real significance in the context of Buckingham Palace.

"If the Prime Minister did know then he never mentioned it to me," she said firmly, glancing down at Newton's police statements. "He thought he was just helping the Palace over a difficult situation as I've said before. If he knew this now he would go off his rocker."

Lady Falkender had later named an official at Buckingham Palace she suspected might well have orchestrated the convenient

timing of the three events: the Prime Minister's resignation, the Royal Marriage break-up and the staging of Newton's trial. She said too that other important people had been involved in choosing that particular week in March 1976. One of them, she felt sure, was a fellow Labour peer in the House of Lords.

It appeared to Lady Falkender that the Palace had, on this occasion, apparently out-manoeuvred one of the most skilful British politicians of all time. For Lady Falkender, the considerations she thought important for Harold Wilson were rather different from those of the interested parties at Buckingham Palace. As far as she was concerned an important moment in British history, the resignation of arguably one of the greatest of all Prime Ministers, might be besmirched by the whole affair.

Lady Falkender had by now realised there would be no easy escape from the awkward predicament which Sir Harold would find himself facing politically. She was irritated, even incensed on occasion, that the reporters' enquiry should have turned out the way it did.

Following another marathon meeting on 28 March at Wyndham Mews, the reporters heard nothing for almost six weeks. Courtiour scanned the newspapers each day in case the ex-Prime Minister suddenly chose to make a public statement about the story he had been told by Lady Falkender. The reporter thought it unlikely he would take this course of action, but he and his colleague had been warned that in the special circumstances there was no telling what Sir Harold might do now.

There was also, of course, the possibility that the ex-Prime Minister might raise the matter publicly in the privilege of the House of Commons. Members of Parliament could not be sued for libel for anything they decided to say in a debate at Westminster. It was a traditional privilege which he might now wish to exploit.

Alternatively Sir Harold could perhaps ask for an official enquiry into recent events, or even demand the Royal Commission he had talked about with Courtiour and Penrose back in May 1976. He might complain that the police and the Security Services, and the Home Office which governed them, had not kept him adequately informed when he had been Prime Minister. He could argue forcefully now that he was facing the dire consequences of not having been fully in the picture in his final months at Number 10.

A pre-emptive strike in Parliament, Penrose thought to himself

with alarm, might turn the situation to Sir Harold's advantage in the long run. After all, he was a very experienced statesman, a man the prominent Tory MP Edward du Cann had once called "the most accomplished politician of our generation". He might now decide to display that Parliamentary skill to extricate himself from an uncomfortable situation. Indeed, Penrose reflected, he might ask himself: "Why should I leave such important matters in the hands of two journalists? I started this enquiry at the beginning: perhaps I should take steps now to see they are properly examined at the highest Parliamentary level."

For once the reporters were reluctant to contact the former Prime Minister and his Political Secretary and ask them outright what was happening. For one thing they knew that Sir Harold did not fully trust the telephones; they might well be tapped he had said. Moreover, there was no doubting that the subject they wanted to raise with him was extremely delicate. For the time being the reporters decided they would have to be patient.

Once the Easter holidays had passed Courtiour could stand the suspense no more. He snatched up the telephone and dialled Lady Falkender's number at Wyndham Mews. Peggy Field answered; she sounded unruffled and cheerful to hear the reporter's voice on the line. Courtiour asked obliquely if she had heard any news about Sir Harold's reactions. He knew that she would understand at once what he was driving at. Peggy had been at the 15-hour meetings with her sister nearly six weeks before. Had she had any feed-back at all, the reporter wanted to know?

"Not really, Roger," she answered without hesitation. "Perhaps we can all talk when next we meet." She offered to make the arrangements for another meeting. She would call him back the next day with a time and a place. As the reporter replaced the receiver he was not certain if Peggy Field was arranging an appointment with Sir Harold or her sister. Frankly it really did not matter: he was pleased that at last something was happening.

On Thursday 5 May the reporters arrived at Wyndham Mews carrying several bulky files. Courtiour suspected he and his colleague might find Sir Harold at the house. There was every reason to suppose he would want to read their papers and transcripts for himself, but on that particular morning there was no sign of his chauffeur, Bill Houseden and the black government saloon. No sign either of the armed Special Branch officer who invariably accompanied the former Prime Minister.

The reporters waited in the drawing-room for Lady Falkender to appear. While Courtiour unpacked their files in neat rows on the floor, Penrose stared once more at the large Bernard Buffet painting hanging above some crowded bookshelves. Buffet had painted the Houses of Parliament in his customary style of contrasting sombre black tones.

Ten minutes later Lady Falkender walked into the room. She was smiling hesitantly and immediately asked the reporters, as she often did, what they had been up to. Courtiour felt she looked slightly apprehensive on this occasion, perhaps remembering what had been discussed at their last meetings.

Guessing why they had wanted to see her Lady Falkender said: "Harold had exactly the same reaction as I had when I told him." Courtiour was quietly pleased that he and his colleague had not had to raise the subject. The reporters made no response, hoping Lady Falkender would keep talking.

"If it all came out," she said, "he said it would, of course, be helping the South Africans. But he doesn't necessarily believe it all even if I do in part."

"It's not Sir Harold's fault and it's not our fault," replied Penrose rather defensively. He at once wished he had said nothing. The information they had sent to the ex-Prime Minister was extremely serious, but they were certainly not responsible for what others at Westminster may have done.

"Would you rather we hadn't told you and Sir Harold what has apparently been going on?" Penrose asked somewhat aggressively.

"I think you must tell him now exactly what you've told me and show him exactly the same things," Lady Falkender replied brusquely. "Harold finds it difficult to accept."

The whole situation, she went on, was something of a mess. Obviously if Sir Harold had known how their investigation would turn out he would probably never have become involved in the first place. Then again, she added thoughtfully, she might be wrong in making those conclusions on his behalf.

Lady Falkender seemed to be at her best in facing a difficult situation. She now betrayed a sharpness and political agility to make fast and firm decisions. The reporters had used her as a useful buffer to pass on the bad news to her employer. In future, she said, they would have to do that for themselves. She feared frankly that she would be blamed for anything that might go wrong. She had been Sir Harold's Political Secretary for more than

twenty years; she had enough experience of such situations to know what she was talking about.

Later that evening the reporters broached the subject again that was still uppermost in their minds. Exactly how had Sir Harold reacted to the news they had left with her at their first meeting back in March?

"I thought Harold would throw me out of the car the other day," she said, trying to make light of her reply. A definite concern showed through in her expression. She explained that she had raised the problem on several occasions in recent weeks. Talking about attempted murder, and other criminal activities, especially in the context of politics and Westminster, she said was no easy matter. Courtiour nodded his agreement vigorously.

Many people had gained the impression, especially from reporters in the Press, that she had a powerful sway over him. This really was wrong, she said, repeating the sentence again for emphasis. It really was not true, whatever others might say. She had discussed the news with him and he had been very concerned, but the reporters would have to show him the same files and judge his reactions for themselves. Courtiour began slipping files back into his briefcase and Penrose told the sisters they would wait for their call. Lady Falkender stood up from her rocking chair and asked the reporters to follow her to the dining-room.

"We can eat now," she said pleasantly. "I am sorry but I just can't take you two without food. There's nothing personal, you understand, but it's just that you two without food is more than flesh and blood can stand."

Courtior promised not to talk about murder, and the conversation over dinner eased the tension which had gripped itself around the conversation up till then. Before they left Wyndham Mews that night they discussed the implications of the recent arrangement which the Labour Government had struck with the Liberal Party at Westminster. The so-called Lib-Lab pact arranged in late March 1977 was actually keeping James Callaghan and his Party in power. Sir Harold had clearly not mentioned anything about murder attempts to the new Prime Minister. If he had informed Mr Callaghan of what Lady Falkender had made plain to him it was highly unlikely that the Labour Government could have entered into the controversial life-saving pact with the Liberals. The Labour Party certainly could not risk such a potentially long-term political embarrassment.

Jeremy Thorpe had also spoken on television about his Party's support for the pact. He had said: "It is identical to the agreement I offered to Edward Heath in February 1974. As Liberals we believe that what we are doing is in the national interest . . . the idea of cooperation between parties in the national interest is clearly gaining ground."

Sir Harold now found himself facing harsh new difficulties. After the reporters' meetings in March at Wyndham Mews, Lady Falkender had discussed the options which were now open to him. She had later discussed them with Courtiour and Penrose. She had stressed at the outset that her prime concern was to protect Sir Harold's name and reputation. She had little doubt that his handling of the affair would ultimately affect his place in history. For the time being, however, the former Prime Minister had decided to remain distinctly silent about the alarming information which had reached him.

## Chapter 28

Having discussed some of the results of their trip to the United States with Harold Wilson, Penrose and Courtiour now felt they should examine the circumstances around the dog-in-a-fog case more carefully. Peter Bessell had poured scorn on Sir Harold's suggestion that the South Africans had stage-managed the whole Liberal Party scandal. Yet at the same time it was Bessell's letter of introduction which had led the reporters to those who had hoped to change the Labour Government by smearing key British politicians, including Harold Wilson and Jeremy Thorpe.

But the former Prime Minister continued to allege that South Africa and right-wing Intelligence circles were the real culprits in the story. The evidence, he said, existed: it was really only a question of the reporters finding it.

When he had first talked to them, he seemed quite convinced that as well as being involved in blackmail, Norman Scott also had strong connections with South Africa. Somewhere, he said, there was a letter from Scott's solicitors advising him to go to South Africa to publish his allegations about the Liberal leader. The ex-Prime Minister thought this reference might turn out to be extremely significant – a clue perhaps to what lay behind the damaging allegations about Jeremy Thorpe – so he had suggested to the reporters that they attempt to get hold of the letter.

Very soon afterwards – sooner than either they or Sir Harold could have expected – a letter came into the reporters' hands which seemed to be the one he had referred to. It was among the papers that Scott had handed over to Courtiour, and it was dated 15 September 1975. It was addressed to Norman Scott from Jeremy Ferguson, and in it the lawyer warned his client that he could be in "very real danger of being badly hurt". He ended his letter of warning: "I repeat my advice to you which is that you should leave the country for South Africa."

Perhaps Sir Harold was right: at first sight this looked like a very strong clue. So Penrose called Ferguson at home and asked him

why he had sent Scott such a warning. Was his client really in some kind of imminent danger during that autumn of 1975?

"A few days before the letter was written," explained the lawyer, "I saw Scott at Barnstaple Police Station. He'd just been arrested on a charge of obtaining a hotel room without paying. Apparently he'd been telling people he intended publishing a book about Jeremy Thorpe from South Africa. Talking to a police officer called Tony Furzeland I learned that my client had been telling the story around the pubs. Furzeland thought he might get beaten up again and I agreed with him in the circumstances."

The reporters checked and found that the model had been arrested on 6 September 1975 for not paying a £28 hotel bill he had run up nine months before. Neither reporter could see the immediate connection between a relatively small unpaid bill and the need for Scott to flee the country. So Penrose asked Scott about the circumstances of the arrest.

On the night of the arrest, Scott had been at the Chequers nightclub with Mrs Edna Friendship, the proprietor of the Market Inn where he was then renting a room in Barnstaple.

Paul Millard, manager of the hotel where the bill had been run up, had also been present at the nightclub and he had pointed Scott out to Detective-Sergeant Tony Furzeland. It seemed strange that the police should go out of their way to arrest somebody at night for that type of small debt. And, according to Scott, the Barnstaple police officers who had questioned him at the Station that night had not appeared particularly interested in the hotel bill which was supposed to be the reason for his arrest. They had said they were interested in examining his letters and other documents which they knew he had. One policeman had told him that he would be released if he allowed them to inspect the papers he kept at the Market Inn. So reluctantly he had agreed and shortly after midnight had driven with Detective-Sergeant Furzeland to the pub.

"Before Mr Furzeland left the pub I asked him where he intended taking Norman," said Mrs Friendship. "He said at once: 'Norman won't be kept in the cells; if necessary I'll put him up at my home or in a hotel.'"

Less than an hour later, however, Scott found himself in the cells. Nobody told him why he was being detained. Indeed he was surprised to be behind bars at Barnstaple Police Station in the first place. But by now he had voluntarily passed over his personal

papers and a police officer was, Scott imagined, already busily photocopying them for his superiors.

Whatever the purpose of the operation which the police had carried out at the dead of night, they now appeared to have left Scott alone apart from charging him formally. Far from being looked after at an officer's home, or a hotel, he was kept in the cells until late the following day. "A police officer told me a man was coming from the Lord Privy Seal's office in London to see me," Scott claimed, although nobody did.

"The first I heard that Scott had been arrested and charged was in the afternoon," said Jeremy Ferguson. "The police told me in the early afternoon and added that he would appear at a special hearing the same day. It seemed most odd bearing in mind that he was charged with a relatively trivial offence."

It was just after he had seen his client that the lawyer chatted with Furzeland and the two men agreed that Scott might be in serious danger. "The police seemed to be anxious to get him out of the cells. Anyway, he was dealt with at a special hearing by magistrates and a clerk, and no Press men or public being present." Scott was found guilty and ordered to pay a fine, which he did soon afterwards.

Once again Norman Scott appeared to have been subjected to very unusual treatment, so Penrose and Courtiour spent some time going over the events of 1975 that had led up to this incident. What was the danger to Scott that the police and the lawyer had talked about? And why was he being advised to go to South Africa? It was clear to the reporters now in the light of Harold Wilson's apprehensions that Scott was probably surrounded by watching eyes and manipulating hands. And if Sir Harold was right they could now be looking at the outer signs of a struggle between rival Security forces. Their experiences in America and the latest revelations of the former Prime Minister had removed all illusions that the Thorpe-Scott affair was merely a private matter and it seemed likely that there was more than met the eye in an operation to detain Scott and pick up his papers.

Back in January 1975, Jeremy Ferguson had still been taking steps on Scott's behalf against Dr Ronald Gleadle in an attempt to recover his client's file of papers. At that stage, while in the process of obtaining Counsel's opinion, Ferguson had apparently decided to obtain a qualified medical opinion on the state of Scott's mental health. He also wanted to explore alternative methods of pro-



ceeding which would help his client, so he had called in to see Douglas Flack, the locum Consultant Psychiatrist at Exe Vale Mental Hospital in Exeter to whom Scott had already been referred for treatment. He then wrote to Scott on 17 January 1975, saying: "We discussed your case for some time and I believe that Dr Flack may very well have a means of helping you which may avoid everything being dragged through the Courts. I can't be very explicit about what he has in his mind but I can tell you that he is not only entirely sympathetic to you and very anxious to help you, but he also feels that he is professionally bound to take certain action concerning Dr Gleadle which may result in you having your file returned without the glare of publicity which would surround a Court case and which might be unhelpful to it."

Dr Flack was clearly very perturbed by what he learned of Scott's story. When Penrose spoke to the psychiatrist he mentioned that he had a certain experience of Intelligence matters from his time in the Services, and although he did not place a great deal of emphasis on this, he had naturally felt that there were aspects of his patient's story which ought to be drawn to the attention of the proper authorities.

On 30 January 1975, Ferguson took Scott over to Exeter for an appointment with Dr Flack. The psychiatrist examined his patient and, for the benefit of the barrister who had already been consulted over the model's legal case, pronounced him sane but suffering from an anxiety condition. Dr Flack decided to send information about the case to the Treasury via a firm of solicitors who acted for the British Medical Association. From listening to Scott he might well have concluded that the police might not be the best people to go to in the circumstances. Equally, Scott had already told his story to various politicians including Members of Parliament and that did not seem to have solved his problems, so Dr Flack explained to the reporters that he thought it best to by-pass political channels. In sending his information to the Treasury, he was in effect drawing it to the attention of the Cabinet Office, the very top of the – supposedly impartial – civil service, and ultimately he thought to the attention of the Prime Minister. At that time of course the man who was Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury was Harold Wilson.

Then on 4 February Jeremy Ferguson wrote to Dr Flack: "I am writing to advise you," he said, "that Mr Scott tells me that he has been approached by a Foreign Publication and he intends to tell

them his story. He seems determined to go through with this course of action despite the warnings which he has been given and I expect that it will be left to you and me and Dr Cracknell to pick up the pieces afterwards." Dr Cracknell of course was Scott's general practitioner – his doctor for physical rather than mental afflictions.

The "Foreign Publication" which had approached Scott appeared to be *Der Spiegel*, the German magazine which had a worldwide reputation for serious investigative journalism and exposure of political scandals. Scott had told Ferguson on the telephone that a German journalist had called him saying his name was Steiner and that *Der Spiegel* was interested in his story and any documents he possessed. An arrangement was being made for Scott to meet Steiner and a colleague for lunch at the Imperial Hotel in Barnstaple, opposite the offices of Michael Barnes.

When Scott turned up at the hotel as arranged however, no one was there to meet him, so he decided to wait in the hotel lounge, setting down his briefcase which contained some of his papers.

Suddenly he was asked to go to the telephone: there was a call for Mr Scott. He was surprised to find himself talking to Steiner. The journalist apologised profusely but his car had broken down. The two men were not going to be able to meet at the Imperial Hotel that day but they would arrange another meeting in the near future.

When Scott returned to the lounge, to his astonishment although he had been gone only a couple of minutes, the briefcase was missing. Even more mysteriously, when Penrose later called *Der Spiegel*, the magazine told him that nobody called Steiner worked for them and no representative had ever made an appointment to meet Norman Scott in Devon.

By a strange coincidence, Peter Bessell had recounted to Penrose the tale of one of the "charades" that had been devised by himself and a supporter of the Liberal Party which had involved the impersonation of a man from *Der Spiegel*. The whole point of this, according to Bessell, had been to get hold of Norman Scott's papers, though the former MP explained that the ruse had been dropped shortly before it was due to be carried out.

Norman Scott's failure to meet the foreign Press did not, however, prevent the dire predictions of Jeremy Ferguson from being fulfilled with uncanny promptitude. After all the build-up actually to getting his story published in *Der Spiegel*, Scott was

plunged into another of his moods of reckless depression. His lawyer was warning him that great harm would come to him if he talked too much, yet his own feeling was that he simply had to make his allegations public in order to save himself. Again, as with the helicopter incident the previous year, he was convinced that he was going to be killed.

On the evening of Wednesday 12 February 1975 Scott, in his agitated state, was drinking at a public house in Barnstaple and telling his story to anyone who would listen, and he was promptly beaten up. His injuries were severe enough for him to be admitted to the Casualty Department at the North Devon Infirmary where, once again, he unburdened his whole story to a social worker. A report of what the social worker heard was placed on file at the Civic Centre in Barnstaple.

Norman Scott's anxieties had now built up to fever pitch. Despite his horror of being placed in a mental hospital, after he had been beaten up he was so desperate that he pleaded to be admitted as an in-patient at the Exe Vale Hospital under Dr Flack's care.

But, as the psychiatrist wrote to Jeremy Ferguson on 13 February, "I want to avoid admitting him into hospital, because a great deal of group psychotherapy goes on in the wards and there will be no way of preventing him from discussing his problems not only with the nursing staff, but with the other patients as well."

To Penrose and Courtiour this seemed the ultimate irony: that when Norman Scott was finally driven to the point of requesting the fate with which he had been threatened in the past, the mental hospital refused to take him in. The problem which had driven him to the verge of mental illness was actually preventing him from being cured of the illness.

How great the pressures on Jeremy Ferguson had been, the two reporters found it difficult to define. The lawyer did not say whether he felt that his professional standing was at risk if he failed to deal with his client's wishes in a manner that was acceptable to other members of the profession. He did however mention to Dr Flack on 18 February that he had seen Mr Punt, the Solicitor to the North Devon Area of the County Council – Jeremy Thorpe's constituency – "who was concerned about the approach which had been made to social workers by Mr Scott and about the implications of any further broadcasting of Mr Scott's story". Probably the most significant summing up of the situation came in the end

from Mr Neil Butterfield, the Counsel whose opinion had been sought in Scott's pending case against Ronald Gleadle. In giving his opinion, Mr Butterfield commented: "Every door has been slammed and all the hatches have been battened down as the establishment, not surprisingly, retreats into close formation to face the threat offered to it."

After this, Norman Scott reacted by doing a disappearing act. For a time Scott slept rough and moved about from place to place, being careful when he telephoned Ferguson not to give his whereabouts. He let it be known that he was already in touch with the *Daily Mail* and the *Express* and arranged a rendezvous with Ferguson to pick up whatever documents the lawyer could lay his hands on. He needed them, it seemed, as a kind of talisman to ward off evil.

It was at this stage that to a superficial observer Scott's connection with South Africa began to appear downright sinister. In his efforts to recover the documents which he had handed over to Gordon Winter in 1971, he contacted the journalist and Winter replied on 2 April 1975 from the Johannesburg office of the *Sunday Express*. "You are most welcome," he said, "to stay in my spare bedroom when you come over." And he ended his letter with a PS: "I'm quite sure that I can break your story from this end. This will make the UK press very much interested. They will consider you a prize at that time and I'm sure there's some deal you can do with one of them maybe through me if you so wish."

In reality Scott claimed that he had neither the desire nor the money to fly to South Africa. All the encouragement to go over there came from Winter, who was visibly slow in responding to the request for his papers.

On 31 May he wrote to Scott again:

Dearest Norm,

So sorry about the muck up re your documents . . . The trouble is all the documents, as you now know, are stored in my safety deposit at my bank in England, because, again, as you know, I trust nobody . . .

I will then immediately have them *all* photocopied and will send you the photocopies.

The delay, to a person of Scott's temperament, was excruciating and Penrose and Courtiour felt that it would not have been

surprising if he really had gone to Johannesburg. Instead he stayed in England and tried to make contact, unsuccessfully, with Peter Bessell who could perhaps supply him with more copies of correspondence. In June he devised a desperate scheme for freeing himself from the problems that had dogged him for so many years and which now, he believed, had placed him in actual physical danger.

His idea was to tell the Department of Social Security that he had lost his Social Security claims book, although this was untrue. A duplicate would then be issued to him and he would go through the unlawful process of drawing out money on both books simultaneously. This was such a foolish and obvious deception that Scott was certain it would be discovered immediately and lead straight to a prosecution.

"I committed fraud quite deliberately in order to get caught and appear in a public courtroom," he explained to the reporters.

Scott insisted that when he had cheated the Department of Health and Social Security out of £58.40, it was to get himself a public platform in a privileged courtroom and not for the money. His idea was that once he had actually spoken out about his problems and the subsequent events, he felt he would be safer.

In fact, it was not until late November 1975 that Scott was questioned and later charged with minor fraud, and the case was not heard for another two months after that.

As far as publication was concerned in the absence of any immediate prosecution for his fraud, Scott had continued to add to the manuscript which he had begun writing earlier. It was a detailed but somewhat sprawling account of all that had happened to him and he hoped that one day, whether he was dead or still alive, it would become a saleable book. In fact, by the end of the summer, Scott had told several people, including his lawyer, that he had visited South Africa to publish his book and intended returning there in the near future. The story was another deliberate lie which Scott told, he said, as a form of protection. If people believed he was abroad, or just about to go abroad, he thought he might be safer.

By the time Scott was arrested over the unpaid hotel bill on 6 September the Barnstaple police had heard his fabricated cover-story and perhaps were taking it seriously. When the CID were questioning him, supposedly about the hotel bill, one officer began talking about the trip he said Scott had recently made to South

Africa. According to Scott, the policeman claimed that he had followed him around while he was there and knew all about his plan to publish a book there. He also mentioned the fact that Scott had received £2,500, presumably referring to the money which Dr Gleadle had deposited in bank accounts opened in Scott's name eighteen months before.

"The police officer told me I could disappear for fourteen years," Scott claimed. "I presume he meant prison. He told me I was in great danger. But I already believed that anyway. The trouble was nobody else did. I remember the police telling me: 'There's a person who's not sleeping well near here.' And the policeman would keep saying he represented the Lord Privy Seal's Office in London."

Scott was apparently left in no doubt personally over what the police questioning was really about. "Things have been really traumatic," he wrote to his brother John a few days later on 10 September. "I have just been released from Prison, only because I allowed them to have my briefcase and the book plus copies of the file from 'South Africa'."

Another kind of nightmare had also begun for Scott on 1 September. Mysterious telephone calls had started to come through to him despite the nervous manner in which he shifted from one address to another. At first the calls came from a man who gave his name as Ian Wright and claimed that he represented an Italian fashion house called "Pinsiero". The house particularly wanted Norman Scott for a new catalogue they intended publishing in the new year, and the fee mentioned was tempting and much above the usual rates for a modelling assignment of the kind Wright described on the phone.

"He promised me £400 a week," Scott explained to the reporters, his face widening with disbelief many months after the offer had been made. "Yes, £400 a week. And so I said immediately: 'Nobody pays £400 a week, that sounds absolutely ludicrous.'"

Scott perhaps had every reason now to be suspicious. In February of that year the two hefty men who had beaten him up had first asked him if he was "Norman Josiffe". Scott had not used his original family name since 1967. On 30 January he had authorised Dr Flack in a legal document to send details of his case to the Treasury Solicitors as "Norman Scott otherwise Norman Josiffe". But how could his two assailants know about that?

Fear was the primary reason why Scott refused the London modelling job he had been offered.

"Although I told Wright I was not interested in the 'Pinsiero' job he kept calling and asking me to consider it seriously. I remember he asked me to call back at seven o'clock in the evening once. I had to call him on the dot."

Unknown to Scott at the time, there was a simple explanation for this. He discovered later that there was no fashion house in London called "Pinsiero", and when Penrose and Courtiour checked, the phone number "Wright" had left turned out to be not "Pinsiero", but a public call-box in Trafalgar Square within a stone's throw of both South Africa House and Whitehall.

But why would anybody take such elaborate steps to entice Scott to London? Indeed why did his lawyer and a local policeman suspect he might be at risk in the peaceful pleasant town of Barnstaple? Was there really someone who was actively planning to injure Scott, even to kill him as he so strongly believed?

It sounded far-fetched, but if "Wright" was a hoaxer, he was astonishingly persistent in his efforts. At the time, Scott was staying with his friends Nicky and Valerie Scoines at their café in Barnstaple High Street, and "Wright" rang so often that they became annoyed by his unwelcome calls. "We couldn't understand, though, how he had traced me to their place and got an unlisted phone number in the first place."

Scott left Nicky's Café and moved to the nearby pub, the Market Inn, where in early September 1975 he became a lodger. His landlady, Edna Friendship, was a forthright, expansive, jolly woman. Unlike many other people who heard Norman's stories, she did not dismiss them out of hand. And when her new lodger began getting yet another string of mysterious phone calls she was rather concerned.

Some of the calls came from a man called "Masterson".

"Masterson had a cultured accent, terribly clipped and precise," Scott recalled. "He sounded very charming at first. He said he was a journalist. He claimed he was with an association and they were prepared to pay me a lot of money for my story. Gordon Winter, the South African journalist, had apparently authorised him to approach me.

"He invited me to come to Bristol. When I didn't go to Bristol that Saturday in question, he rang me and became very angry. He said if I wasn't going to cooperate it would make things more

difficult for me. I put the phone down because I really didn't trust him."

Scott rang friends in London but they were unable to trace a journalist called Masterson. He also wrote a letter to Gordon Winter in Johannesburg but on 1 October 1975 Winter replied from South Africa: "I have *not* authorised any person, particularly *not* a journalist, to contact you on my behalf."

But the mysterious telephone calls continued. Edna Friendship took a call from a man who said he was interested in a stills camera that her tenant had for sale. Although Scott said he had no such camera, like "Ian Wright" the man rang several times. Mrs Friendship distinctly remembered him and so did her barman and the cleaning lady. "He rang quite a lot I can tell you," Mrs Friendship told Courtiour. "Called himself Keene, Peter Keene, that was him."

"Keene's voice alternated," Scott recalled, "between a funny, lazy North of England accent and a Scottish burr." Perhaps this was why he failed to realise that he had already met the owner of the voice face to face. There had been an incident in a Barnstaple pub called the Three Tuns a short while before when Scott had spoken to a stranger who was chatting to a local trawler skipper and smoking a pipe.

"Would you mind moving away," Scott had said, "because you're smoking a very evil-smelling tobacco in your pipe?" But Keene had stayed where he was.

Afterwards Keene had left his tobacco pouch behind in the pub, something which David, a barman at the Three Tuns, recalled later, Keene was also remembered by some of the regulars because he asked rather a lot of questions.

The next time Scott saw Keene was on Sunday 12 October and the next day he wrote an account of what happened in a letter to his former wife Sue. Keene was eventually to be identified as Andrew Newton and he too, set down his version of the meeting in a statement to the police on 20 November 1975.

Scott, it seemed, had been walking through the old Pannier Market carrying a bundle of laundry when Keene had come up to him and said he wanted to have a word.

Scott suddenly recalled the stranger with the awful pipe tobacco and then began stammering, eventually blurting out that he could not talk to him.

"He walked after me, very fast," said Scott. "He said: 'Look,

you've got to talk to me, you're in a great deal of trouble, I suppose you know you are. I don't think you really realise this but you are going to be killed. A gentleman has been paid over four figures to kill you. He's coming from Canada and I want to help you.'

"The man began to explain that a lady wanted to see me. I asked him what was her name, but he replied: 'I can't tell you at this stage. It's just a lady.'

"I mentioned the name of one lady and he said simply 'Yes.' I told him I'd drop off my washing at the Market Inn and return afterwards. He asked me to bring back any documents I had with me."

Edna Friendship was tidying up in the bar when Scott walked in.

He asked her to see if she could get a look at the man outside and take down the number of his yellow Mazda.

When Scott had agreed to return, he said he was not prepared to go with Keene in his car to meet the lady: Keene must make her come to him. So Keene had mentioned that he would make a phone call from the nearby public kiosk. It was while he was doing this that Edna Friendship went out to see:

"I walked out with my dog to have a look at this person," she explained to Courtiour in a matter-of-fact way. "I saw him. And I got the number of his yellow Mazda."

Meanwhile Norman Scott had left the Market Inn carrying his briefcase which contained copies of his few precious documents.

"When I returned I asked if he had got in touch with her. 'No I couldn't,' he said, 'she's in her car in a lay-by. She doesn't want to be seen, as you can appreciate.' I suggested we might meet another time. Then he told me: 'I don't think you realise the danger you are in.'

"I just kept arguing, refusing to go. He started to get forceful and really terse, and far from being very polite he became very coarse and agitated."

Eventually Scott agreed to go to a nearby hotel and talk.

It was then that the man explained that he was Peter Keene the same person who had spoken to Scott on the telephone. Keene recalled later that the ex-model kept on taking pills: "He was taking what I presumed to be prescribed drugs in two's and at frequent intervals. He was very frightened, his fingers were trembling, shaking, and his brow was wet, almost like a fever."

The conversation eventually went on for nearly four hours and Keene began taking notes. But first he explained why he wanted to talk with Scott.

"Keene said he was being paid to protect me," Scott explained, "and he wanted to know from me about the whole background of my story. I realise now he was only trying to gain my confidence. He kept emphasising the dangerous position I was in. Then he emphasised that I should go to a local solicitor and make a statement saying that all I had written was lies. If I handed everything to him I would receive a large sum of money and that would be the end of it."

"When I said it was tantamount to blackmail and that 'if someone is going to come and kill me it would hardly help the situation,' he became aggressive. He started a tirade, saying: 'This is no bullshit, Norman, they will show you somehow.' When I asked what he meant by that he asked me: 'What is the nearest thing to you?'"

"Everyone knows that my son Benjamin, who lives with my ex-wife in Lincolnshire is the most important thing to me. Keene then said: 'You'll see.'"

"I just broke down then and said I didn't want to talk about it any more. But he kept asking if I would go and see the local solicitor."

Less than six weeks later when Newton/Keene wrote down his recollections of that conversation, he was to add a few details which were eventually to reverberate through the British establishment. According to him Scott had claimed to have met socially "prominent figures in the political arena". He claimed he once met "Antony Armstrong-Jones", Princess Margaret's husband.

This was included in Newton's statements to the police. There was a distinct possibility that one day they might be read out in open court. Quite unjustly it looked as if a member of the British Royal Family might be dragged into the Norman Scott story.

"He said he had written a book which he was going to publish in South Africa, exposing the corruption of the politicians and naming people by name. The advice I offered him was for him to sell all his original documents to some solicitor that he was aware of. I made no actual threats of violence towards him on this occasion, but merely went along with him," Newton also stated.

Before leaving the hotel, the man, then, of course, calling himself Keene asked Scott once again if he were prepared to meet the local solicitor who had been mentioned and shortly afterwards he repeated the question on the phone. Scott refused.

"Keene rang me several times," he told the reporters, "and tried

to persuade me to meet him once more. Frankly I was just too nervous."

A fortnight later "Peter Keene" tried to contact Scott at another pub in Combe Martin called the Pack of Cards. By this time Scott had moved again and was living in a cottage in this village.

The landlady at the Pack of Cards, Pam Vernon-Evans, took the call and went to find him in the bar.

"First he called himself Andrew and I couldn't understand why," Scott told Penrose. "Then he reverted to Peter. His change ran out almost immediately and he gave me the number of the phone where he was speaking from. He was calling from Glasgow. I wrote down the number on a piece of paper Pam passed to me and then called him back.

"Keene said almost at once: 'Our friend from Canada is in the country. I must see you.'

"Anyway, he said he'd be down in Combe Martin on the Friday, 24 October 1975. We arranged to meet at six o'clock.

"Keene was anxious that I shouldn't tell anyone about our meeting and asked who I'd been keeping in touch with over current events."

By now several people in the Barnstaple area were aware of "Keene" and his interest in Norman Scott.

When Edna Friendship told the police about Keene she was treated politely but her worries were dismissed with scepticism. Scott's friends found this rather odd because his solicitor had actually written to him after the September arrest to say that Tony Furzeland, the detective, had specially asked for Scott to keep in touch with him: "he wants to be quite sure that if you are in danger, he will be able to afford you some protection."

If Scott was so apprehensive about Keene, the reporters wondered why he had agreed to meet him again. But Scott's nervousness had often driven him to talk to anyone who showed interest in his affairs and he wanted to find out what information Keene had about the men who were coming to kill him. He felt a little more confident now that he had acquired a very large dog, a Great Dane named Rinka which had been given to him by his friends Chris and Janet Lawrence.

So he went along to the rendezvous taking Rinka with him.

"He told me he had a client to meet in Porlock, which is a coastal village on another side of Exmoor," Scott continued. "I asked him what he wanted to do and he suggested I went along

with him for the ride. 'But I don't want that dog in the car,' I remember he said at the time.

"I'd rather she was with me," I told him. "While you are with your client I can take Rinka for a walk."

The two men drove off in the Ford Escort Keene had borrowed for the weekend from one of his girlfriends. Rinka sat in the back, her gangling body filling much of the saloon's interior.

"On the way," Scott said, "Keene claimed that the hired killer from Canada had arrived in the country and I was in danger. He complained that he was 'knackered': he had apparently driven a long way that day."

According to Keene's version, however, he did not have a client to meet in Porlock: "The presence of the dog in the car had made complications as far as what I intended to do," he wrote in his statement. "We reached Porlock where I pretended I had someone to meet. I dropped Scott off at a hotel and said I would meet him at eight o'clock outside."

For some reason Keene explained that he had not entered the pub where Scott had just been drinking because he must not be seen in public with him.

"Keene had been driving a long way, he told me, and I offered to put him up for the night. He said simply: 'We'll see.'"

Keene later agreed that he certainly did not want to be seen in public with Scott. He was also against staying at Scott's home for the night. "The idea was obviously put forward for some sexual deviation," he claimed later.

When Scott spoke to the reporters he adamantly denied this was the reason for his suggestion that Friday night. He had merely noticed that Keene was pale and exhausted.

"We drove along home towards Porlock Hill and he started to sway the car about the road, and I said: 'Gosh, are you tired?' And he said he was. I offered to drive and he said I could later."

It was pitch dark by now and there were no lights on this stretch of the A39. Keene managed to pull across the road and stop precisely at a dirt lay-by near the cliffs which towered over the Bristol Channel less than two hundred yards away.

Scott got out of the car to take over the driving from the tired Keene. He still had no sense of the danger he was in and intended only to walk round and switch places with his companion so that they could drive on immediately.

According to Scott, the moment of horror arrived with brutal

suddenness. Instead of just changing seats as expected the man said to him harshly: "No, it's now."

"With that there was a strange noise and the dog just fell. The wind was howling and I shouted to Keene: 'You've shot my dog. Oh no, not my dog!'

"Keene got hold of me, putting my right arm behind my back in some sort of lock. I still couldn't see a gun or anything. He held something to my head saying: 'It's your turn.' And then: 'Oh fuck, oh fuck!'"

Somehow in the clumsy scramble between the two men Scott had not heard the sharp crack of the gun which had killed the Great Dane. Perhaps in the buffeting wind the sound of the shot had been lost. But the dog had been hit at point blank range and lay bleeding to death in the darkness, in the doorway of the car.

Scott's account of his dog being shot was again, in essence, much the same as the story later told by Keene, except that Keene did not mention actually pointing the gun at Scott's head.

"Because of the isolated position we were in and that there were no cars about, I decided to take some course of action towards frightening him . . . the idea was to fire the pistol near him to make him realise that the blackmailing had to stop as otherwise the pistol in someone else's hands could be aimed at him.

"The presence of the dog and its size would have made this gesture impossible so I decided to shoot the dog. I took the pistol to hand, levelled it at the dog's head and pulled the trigger. There was a frightening bang and Norman seemed paralysed between apprehension and action."

"Keene came back towards me with his arm pointed at me. I ran a few paces onto the moors, then thought of Rinka and ran back. And Keene levelled his arm at me again. He then rushed to the headlights again and he screamed out: 'Oh fuck!'"

In fact, Keene's gun had jammed after he had shot the dog. Round at the front of the car he had attempted desperately to make it fire again. Repeatedly he banged the gun against his knee, his hand shaking, his nerve apparently going to pieces.

Keene was quite open later in admitting that he had wanted to fire the gun a second time. "I pulled the trigger many times, but it failed to go off," he said. 'I then tried to re-cock the gun, still to no avail. I went into the beam of the headlights of the car and saw that a bullet was jammed in the mechanism . . . I was very frustrated and frightened."

Keene was not exactly certain if he had cursed as often as Scott had alleged: "I could quite possibly have been cursing," he admitted, though. "I was annoyed at the fact that Norman failed to do anything positive such as run away or show any reaction so that I could have done something towards him."

"I know it sounds stupid," Scott explained disarmingly, "but I was trying to give my dog the kiss of life. I was breathing into her mouth, trying to revive Rinka."

But why had Keene shot the Great Dane? If he had merely wanted to frighten Scott, why should he leave the dead body of an animal as evidence of his crime instead of just firing the gun into the air?

"Why I did it," he explained, "was because I didn't want Scott warning the dog, because he'd said that all he had to do was click his fingers and the thing would rip my throat apart."

Whatever Keene's intentions on Exmoor had been – and Scott was convinced the aim had been to kill him – he had eventually escaped from the scene of the crime.

"Keene suddenly jumped in the car and shouted something like: 'I'll be back, I'll get you.' I was just screaming at God, to be honest," said Scott quietly. "About five or ten minutes later a car came along and I ran out in the road and waved it down. I said: 'Oh please, someone's shot my dog and tried to shoot me.'"

Scott was driven back towards Porlock that night by an ambulance driver. He was shaken, distressed and still convinced that Keene would return later and finish him off. That was what the man had promised before he had jumped into his car and roared off into the night.

He was taken to Minehead Hospital where he was treated for shock and then released apparently unharmed physically by what had occurred. Waiting at the hospital was a police officer who asked Scott if he would go to the local police station and make a statement. The CID officer confidently told the model that some forty police cars were out on the moors looking for the man who had shot his dog.

On 26 October 1975, 36 hours after the extraordinary events on the moors, Detective-Sergeant McCreery from the local police force arrived at 3 Park Lane, Combe Martin to talk to Scott about the incident with "Peter Keene". Like many of his colleagues from Barnstaple, the CID officer had heard about Scott's previous allegations and was sceptical about any story emanating from the

one-time model. The events Scott described on the moor sounded fanciful and unlikely and perhaps he had invented them in an attempt to draw attention to himself? Nevertheless he spent nearly four hours taking down a long statement from Scott of what had occurred. The statement was to end up by being nineteen pages in length.

He also wrote down the names of other people who knew about Peter Keene.

At the time when he raced away from the scene of the shooting, Peter Keene must have felt fairly confident that he would not be caught. Keene was not his real name, of course, and he had been careful to avoid being seen too openly in Scott's company. He was also using a borrowed car.

But Keene did not know about the car registration number which Edna Friendship had noted on the earlier occasion when he had driven a yellow Mazda in Barnstaple on 11 October. Although the local police had been generally sceptical about Scott's story, they began making enquiries to try and trace the owner of this car, and sooner or later they expected to catch up with the killer of Scott's dog.

Seven days after the shooting there was also some intriguing publicity about the case.

The *Sunday Express* wrote about "the strange story of a pet Great Dane, shot through the head, a terrified man found wandering across Exmoor at night and police secrecy".

The newspaper reporter went on: "Local people are asking why has the case of a shot dog been taken over by the deputy head of the Avon and Somerset CID, Detective Superintendent Michael Challes?" The newspaper reported Mr Challes as saying: "I am in charge because of the ramifications of this affair." He refused to explain further.

But the national newspapers on the whole were slow to react. However the local *West Somerset Free Press* on 31 October 1975 led with the Scott story on its front page. "THE GREAT DANE DEATH MYSTERY: DOG-IN-A-FOG-CASE Baffles Police," said the headline:

"Police are believed to be still investigating at press time, a mystery as impenetrable as moorland fog, in which a self-described political writer is said to have claimed that an attempt was made on his life.

"Police at Bridgewater refused to confirm or deny a story that had gained circulation – that the killer of the pet also tried to shoot

the man, but that the gun jammed. Neither would they say whether the dog owner is a Mr Norman Scott, of Park Lane, Combe Martin.

"All I can tell you is that we are investigating the shooting of a dog on Friday evening," said Chief Superintendent Rupert Ormerod on Tuesday." Yet another senior police officer had apparently become involved in the shot dog case.

The local newspaper, however, was not able to find Norman Scott, who had gone into virtual hiding. He was still terrified in case "Peter Keene" returned. After all, Keene was still at large and Scott believed the police were not showing any particular anxiety to catch him.

The *Somerset Free Press* ended its front-page article: "Press reports on Tuesday claimed that Mr Scott had left the West Country for South Africa."



## Chapter 29

The disturbing news about Norman Scott's imminent court appearance reached 10 Downing Street a few weeks before Christmas 1975. It was accompanied by alarming rumours about the ex-model: Scott was to be the chief prosecution witness at the forthcoming trial of the civil aviation pilot called Andrew Gino Newton; no firm date had yet been fixed for that trial.

One of the rumours to reach the Prime Minister and his aides was that Newton had killed a dog on Exmoor. The dog belonged to Scott and he had seen it shot. The Prime Minister, earlier, had discussed the incident with Marcia Williams and thought the South Africans were probably involved in the case. The Prime Minister and Marcia Williams were solely and genuinely concerned about the Liberal leader's sad plight. There was a very real prospect of their friend's name being unfairly dragged into the approaching court cases. Scott, and later Newton, would stand in the dock perhaps justly accused of various crimes. But it would probably be the Liberal leader who would be judged in the end. Such was the view from Number 10. It all seemed to depend on whether Scott, or Newton, mentioned the Liberal politician's name in open court. Either accused might try that particular ploy in a vainhearted attempt to save their own skins. The ensuing political effects could damage not only the Liberal Party, but the Labour Government too.

At Buckingham Palace, only a short distance away from Downing Street, equally important people were worried about Scott's forthcoming court appearances. Either case might be turned into well-publicised and embarrassing trials.

Lord Snowdon had gratuitously been mentioned in passing in Newton's police statements. These might be read out in court and then written about freely in the Press. In some way Princess Margaret and her husband could be unfairly associated with the Scott story. It was naturally an unjust and unwelcome prospect for a member of the Royal Family to face. Again, everything rather hung on whether Scott or Newton said anything. Or would they try

and divert attention from themselves by blurting out Lord Snowdon's name, although irrelevant and wholly unjustified.

Newton at first hoped he could also avoid any Press publicity. But from police contacts Fleet Street had heard they should take a closer look at people involved in the dog-in-a-fog case. Reporters were sent off to find Newton.

Newton would probably have kept silent if it had not been for an old school friend called Dave Miller. Several newspapers had also been searching for photographs of Newton and Miller turned out to be extremely helpful. He handed to Fleet Street pictures of the shy pilot. Newton was furious when he heard what his friend had done and immediately called a Press conference at his flat near Blackpool.

Newton's Press conference was in the circumstances rather premature. For one thing it was held before his trial and much of what he said to reporters was *sub judice*. Penrose later read through the notes taken by a Blackpool news agency who had listened to Newton at his unexpected meet-the-Press session.

Sitting close to a bookcase containing a motley collection of spy thrillers and books on the occult. Newton had talked freely about the background to his forthcoming trial.

About one aspect of the affair Newton was wholly adamant: "There is no tie-up between me and Jeremy Thorpe or between me and any political person or party. I intend to plead not guilty at the trial . . .

"I think it is wrong for Mr Thorpe to be dragged through the mud by men of straw and something needs to be changed. I have never met Thorpe or Wilson and Scott is a petty vindictive man . . .

"I was being blackmailed and perhaps I did what a lot of people should have done a lot sooner."

Newton had ended his Press conference with the familiar remarks with which he had started: "There was no homosexual relationship between me and Norman Scott." It was a theme which ran through his police statements and was to be repeated later at his trial.

In that same period before Christmas, Jeremy Thorpe was also anxious about the two forthcoming court cases. He was particularly fearful of what Scott might say publicly. It was not only that his one-time friend might openly make wild allegations. He was also worried in case outsiders might draw the wrong conclusions about the dog-in-a-fog mystery. People could falsely

imagine that he and his party were somehow involved. Politicians were often the inaccurate subject of pernicious gossip.

He had expressed his concern when he had met his London lawyer, Lord Goodman. It was not the first time that he had turned to the Labour peer for advice about the Scott problem, for ten years before he had visited Lord Goodman accompanied by Peter Bessell. The lawyer had suggested the manner in which Scott should be tackled. (The reporters had noticed that Lord Goodman had also given legal advice to Harold Wilson and Lord Snowdon.)

If the Prime Minister, the Royal Family and the Liberal leader were apprehensive about the Newton trial, Norman Scott on the whole was not. He was hoping that he might be vindicated during the court proceedings. On 29 January 1976 at the DHSS hearing he had made his public allegations against Jeremy Thorpe but he had received a generally hostile Press in the rumpus which followed. In the weeks before the Newton trial opened he had been cast in an almost Victorian theatrical mould. Scott was portrayed as a dubious, if not sinister, character who could be booed and hissed each time he appeared in public.

But he still thought that at Newton's trial he might be cleared of the charge that he was a fantasist and a liar. In any event his evidence would obviously be a vital factor in determining the pilot's guilt or innocence. The ex-model had no doubt whatsoever that Newton had tried to murder him. He would tell this to the jury.

On the opening day of the trial, 16 March 1976, a crowd had gathered in the grounds of Exeter Castle where the trial was to be held. Andrew Newton arrived at the scene with a girlfriend who had travelled down with him from Blackpool. A slim pretty girl, Eleanor Rooney was wearing a wig to disguise herself from the waiting Press men. But Dave Miller soon recognised her.

Newton looked smart and supremely confident. There was a feeling of contrived publicity about the occasion. Press men gathered noisily around him. He treated the event as if he were a celebrity. Few outsiders would have guessed that the 29-year-old jet pilot faced serious criminal charges and the possibility of going to prison for anything up to twenty years.

Outside the court an official put up a "House Full" sign. Not everybody could get in to watch the legal proceedings that morning. The Press benches were packed with reporters, not all of them British: there were Americans and South Africans sitting among them.

Once the jury had been sworn in, the court got down to work. The charges against Newton were read out solemnly. The atmosphere grew more serious. But there were distractions, some of them important.

At mid-day a news agency man came hurrying into the courtroom. He whispered excitedly to a colleague: "The Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, has resigned. It's official." The journalists in the courtroom realised that the Norman Scott story would be relegated to the inside pages. There was worse news to come as far as the reporters were concerned. Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon had decided to enter a legal separation. In the view of Fleet Street at the time two bigger stories had in a stroke pushed out another major story.

Back in court, a leading barrister, Lewis Hawser, QC, led for the Prosecution in the case of Regina versus Andrew Gino Newton. The lawyer was used to tackling tricky criminal cases, especially if they had important political overtones.

For Patrick Back, QC, the task of defending Andrew Newton was, at least on the surface, largely run-of-the-mill. In the past he had defended other men accused of perpetrating serious acts of violence.

The judge was Sir Neil Lawson, who had become a judge in 1971. He looked out at his court with a puzzled look in his eyes. Rarely had a trial he had conducted attracted such spectacular attention from the media. Months later Penrose spoke to Mr Justice Lawson. Was he aware of the political implications of the trial. Were they an important consideration, even if the case itself looks straightforward enough?

"Not at all," the judge answered at once. "The case was dealt with on its merits." As far as he was concerned he said any political ramifications were ignored.

But outside the rarefied atmosphere of the Crown Court were those who did not wish to forget the political considerations which had become caught up with a violent crime. There were undoubtedly those in South Africa and elsewhere who might well have enjoyed the spectacle of such a trial attracting huge publicity. Some might well have been disappointed when other news items burst dramatically into the headlines. Indeed if it had not been for the Prime Minister's shock decision, and the news about the Royal couple, the Andrew Newton trial would have gained even greater prominence in the Press and on television. In the event, the

departing Premier stole the boldest headlines from the public appearances of Newton and Scott. Partly to escape the fuss over his marriage Lord Snowdon had flown off to Australia.

At exactly the time the Prime Minister was speaking to his Cabinet, the Commons and the country, Norman Scott was speaking at length to an attentive court in Exeter. The Press went on listening even if their editors were no longer quite as interested in what was being said.

The Newton trial went on for four days. Scott was the main prosecution witness. For many newsmen and the attending public he was the notorious star of the show.

Giving evidence he was obviously nervous; at times he broke down and began to weep. Once he told the judge that he was upset talking about his dead dog Rinka.

"I wish the man had bloody shot me," he said, beginning to cry. "If I hadn't had Rinka that day he would have killed me."

Scott attracted little sympathy from court officials, though few would have argued that the experience on the moors on the night of 24 October 1975 was pleasant.

And although Scott stammered occasionally, and perspired freely, he was by no means intimidated by the full panoply of the law paraded in front of him.

Patrick Back, QC, defending Newton, suggested to Scott that he invented fanciful tales and then came firmly to believe them. Sarcastically he scoffed when Scott said that in 1973 he had been schooling point-to-pointers at his lonely cottage on Exmoor. How could he possibly have been schooling horses? Earlier he claimed he was too ill; in any case where had the money come from to pay for the point-to-pointers?

"Has anybody ever told you, or ever suggested to you, that you are an incorrigible liar?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, Mr Thorpe on Sunday," replied Scott, alluding to an article the Liberal leader had written about Scott in the *Sunday Times* the previous weekend. Thorpe had said in the article that Scott's claims were a "tissue of elaborated woven mendacity and malice . . . subsequently I discovered that he was an incorrigible liar."

"I should imagine there are people in everybody's lives who have been calling them incorrigible liars at some stage," replied Scott defiantly. "It is a very easy way of getting out of a situation."

"I suggest that is what you have been doing for the past

half-hour," said Mr Back. "About your mind being taken away from you by pills; your tales of training horses from 6 am to 10 pm."

"We are back on horses," replied Scott. "It is totally irrelevant. I'm not lying about my caring for horses and not lying about the fact I wasn't capable of looking after myself. I wasn't very good with people, but with animals I know I'm all right."

Although much of the case centred around the high drama which had taken place on the moors, there were lighter moments too that day in court.

In his police statement Scott had alleged that Newton spoke of a hired gunman coming from Canada to kill him. Patrick Back asked his witness: "How was he going to come from Canada? By air or boat?"

Scott replied at once: "Really, if somebody is going to kill you, are you going to ask how much they are going to do it for, or whether he is coming by plane or ship or what? I was just terrified." Scott was no easy push-over for a first-class London barrister employed to pick holes in prosecution witnesses. His demeanour, his ability to answer questions sharply at times, was certainly different from the portrait which had been sketched of him in some of the popular Fleet Street tabloids.

Gradually the public might be excused for thinking that Norman Scott, not Newton, was on trial. The ex-model was cross-examined for hours as if he, not the pilot, had been pointing an unlicensed gun at a stranger in mysterious circumstances.

In contrast, Newton's only witness for the defence was not given such a rough ride in court as Norman Scott. Henrietta Falconer was a former British Island Airways hostess who had lived with Newton in Blackpool from 1971 to 1973.

The long-haired blonde was 21 years old. Her evidence supported Newton's claim that Scott came to see him in Blackpool in the autumn of 1974. Mrs Falconer (who married in that same year, and separated from her husband shortly afterwards) remembered Scott arriving in Blackpool one Saturday morning, she said.

She told the court: "Andrew was building a battleship and it was a small room and the table was knocked accidentally. It was a leaf table, and, as the door opened, a few parts of the ship fell on the floor which I picked up."

Mrs Falconer said that Andrew came into the room with a man. She was picking up the bits of the broken battleship and then got

the feeling she was not wanted. A few minutes later she left the flat.

Patrick Back asked the witness if she had been impressed by "any particular characteristic in that short time"?

"I thought he was a queer," she answered immediately. "Do you mean that in the sexual sense?" Mr Justice Lawson intervened to ask. Mrs Falconer nodded and said "Yes."

When Newton had been giving evidence he first said he was building a galleon when Scott called at his flat. Only later had he remembered that it was a battleship which had fallen on the floor. He said he had knocked the model off the table.

Patrick Back asked his witness if she had seen the man who had visited her boyfriend outside the court before?

"Yes," said Mrs Falconer looking around the crowded courtroom.

"Have you seen him; indeed, do you see him inside the court?" said the barrister.

Mrs Falconer went on staring at the people in the well of the court. Apparently she could not see the man she claimed she saw in Blackpool. There was an embarrassed silence. It was broken when Scott suddenly stood up in a flippant gesture. He said afterwards he was only trying to help the witness out of her awkward predicament.

Mr Justice Lawson snorted at the time: "That is the end of that experiment." Pointing at Scott, he asked Mrs Falconer: "Is that the person?"

Lewis Hawser for the prosecution asked her: "Since Andrew has been arrested, have you ever had any talk with him about the description of the man who came to his flat in the autumn of 1974?"

"No," said the witness.

"Are you sure?" said the lawyer. "Let me tell you quite plainly that Mr Newton, when I asked him about this, agreed that he had talked to you?"

Mrs Falconer looked over towards Andrew Newton in the dock. "He talked to me?" she asked Mr Hawser. Suddenly she said that was right: "He talked to me."

In reply to other questions put by the prosecution she said that originally she had agreed to attend an identification parade in Devon. But she had later decided against going to Barnstaple.

Inspector McCreery from the Devon Police had even offered to

bring Scott up to Blackpool to save Mrs Falconer the trouble of travelling to the West Country. But she had finally not attended any identification parade.

The witness also conceded that on 3 December 1975 she had said in a statement to the police that "there is a possibility I could identify the queer man again".

The court were told that police enquiries had revealed no link whatsoever between Andrew Newton and the Liberal Party or any person who had been named by Norman Scott.

From the witness box, Detective-Sergeant Peter Hinde, who had worked on the case since October 1975, made clear that their enquiries established no connection between one of Britain's three major Parties and the dead Great Dane incident. Whether there was possibly a South African link with the trial was not raised in the proceedings.

But if the South Africans, the culprits Sir Harold Wilson believed were behind Thorpe's problems, had not been brought into the courtroom drama, there still remained other unsolved mysteries for the public to puzzle over.

For example, where did an airline pilot find a gun in the first place? In comparison with America, and most European countries, it was still difficult to acquire an unlicensed gun in Britain.

According to Newton's police statements, he had borrowed it from a man called simply "Den" presumably short for the Christian name Dennis. In court, the pilot had stuck to the same story about his firearm. It had jammed on the night of the shooting, he said. He could not have killed Scott after shooting the dog.

The gun, a German Mauser, had been examined by a Home Office forensic expert called Peter Prescott. He gave evidence at the trial. The small-bore, 2.5 calibre automatic was standard and altogether unremarkable, he had said. There was no particular reason why this particular gun should jam.

"I shouldn't think it's more prone to jam than any other gun," he told Courtiour months later. "Provided, of course, it's kept clean.

"It's simple, if you put a gun in your pocket along with a lot of bits and pieces it will get messed up. A gun must be kept clean if it's going to work properly."

"Den" was "a gentleman" who collected antiques. For the prosecution Lewis Hawser asked "Was that the only connection he had with guns?"

Eventually the pilot said, "I think he's a lorry driver who collects antiques."

Newton's decision to tell at least something of the truth was to prove slow and hesitant. As he was later to admit, his early version of events was more of an approximation than the simple truth.

When he was asked at his trial why he told untruths he replied bluntly: "Because I didn't want to get caught."

He had finally agreed, when questioned by the police, that he did shoot Scott's dog on Exmoor after the most extreme provocation. He went out of his way in that statement and later in court to stress that there had been no sexual relationship with Scott whatsoever. The reason he had shot Rinka was because he alleged Scott had been blackmailing him over a nude photograph.

Although Newton had killed the Great Dane with one bullet, he said he had *not* pulled the trigger of his automatic Mauser a second time. There was no question, he claimed, that he wanted to kill Scott.

The police had told him shortly after his arrest that he would be charged with possessing a firearm and with intent to endanger life. The moment he had known the charge he had suddenly announced: "I might as well tell you all of what happened."

The pilot had then contradicted what he had said a short while before. He now said he *had* tried to fire the gun a second time. Both detectives interviewing him that Thursday morning, 20 November, wondered if he was now telling the truth.

"I did try to fire the gun after I shot the dog, but it jammed," he said firmly.

By the time Sergeant Hinde began taking down the pilot's statement, Newton seemed sure he had attempted to pull the trigger of his allegedly jammed Mauser. But his statement began with talk of blackmail, not guns. It was the same story he brought out in his defence in court.

His police statement itself, parts of which had been read out in court, had begun: "It started off with me answering an advertisement in one of the many contact magazines on the market. My reply was to a lady of leisure and because response to replies received more formal consideration if a photograph was forwarded, I forwarded a nude photograph of myself with an enclosed letter. This would have been late last year.

"The agency then forwarded the correspondence to the advertiser. About three weeks later a man appeared on my doorstep at

my last address, 11 Romney Avenue, Blackpool, and stated that he had come in reply to the advertisement in the magazine.

"I was a little surprised to see him as it is normal practice for your letter to be returned or a reply sent arranging a meeting if suitable with a female. I invited him in and my girlfriend, Henrietta Falconer, left.

"He said that he had received my photograph, my revealing photograph, and my letter. In a twenty-minute conversation that took place he suggested that if he was careless the photograph could find its way to people that mattered in the company that I worked for.

"He went to great pains to point out that he did not have the photographs on him then. He made no suggestion of any homosexual activity between us but in a very diplomatic and tactful way, suggested that I pay him £4 per month for being careful. And considering my job it was cheap at the price. He left leaving me no name or address as to where to send the money. He said that he would be in touch."

Newton went on to claim that in January the following year he received a phone call from Scott.

"He was asking what I was playing at and had I received his letter? I said that I had only yesterday and that the £4 was on its way."

Scott's blackmail letter had been described in detail in Newton's statements to the Bridgewater police. But he admitted that he no longer had any of them to prove what he was saying. One letter was said to have arrived in January 1975. Inside Newton said was a self-addressed envelope and the figure £4 on a piece of paper.

"The envelope had the address typed on and was care of somebody or other in Barnstaple," he had said "... I can't recall the name on the envelope. There was no area stamp on the envelope that arrived, merely a Post Early for Christmas stamp."

But worse still for his story was the fact that he could not produce the blackmail letter itself. He claimed that when he had sent the £4 early in 1975, Scott had instructed him to send it to another address in Barnstaple: the Market Inn. Scott had moved to the pub in September of that year, staying there for less than six weeks.

Newton told the police and later the jury at his trial: "I decided that things were obviously going to get worse. He was beginning to increase the payments."

At this point – it was 11 October 1975 – the pilot hired a yellow Mazda and drove down to Barnstaple where he spotted his blackmailer talking with local people in the Three Tuns pub. He had watched Scott for a time, but decided against speaking to the man he said endangered his career and future as a jet pilot.

Late the next morning, a Sunday, Newton had made his first real approach to Scott.

“I approached him and said I wanted to talk to him about blackmail,” Newton later told the police. “He appeared very frightened and I suggested that we go for a ride out of the town together. He refused the invitation and said we could talk in a pub together just as easily.

“My sole purpose in seeing Scott was to try and stop the blackmail but as the afternoon developed and he started telling me about the various relationships he had had and was actually bragging about the money he was receiving as a result of them, I began to realise that there was something here that I might use to frighten him into stopping blackmailing me. I began to take notes – I was just jotting everything down he was saying as best I could.”

But why had Newton adopted the alias Peter Keene? In his police statement he had broached the subject, but did not answer it:

“When I returned to Blackpool I decided to give myself an alias of Peter Keene in an attempt to frighten Scott, by ringing him as this Peter Keene and telling him that he was in danger and warning him of the consequences of blackmailing people. I was hoping by this method that he might then stop blackmailing me.”

Newton’s two main statements to the police made compelling reading. So did his testimony in court: despite the fact that they all contained apparent contradictions. His statements had not been fully read out in court for reasons which Courtiour and Penrose were now well aware. The reporters had spent weeks trying to get copies of them. But neither the police nor Newton’s lawyers would help.

In August 1976 an Irish contact had finally allowed Penrose to read Newton’s statements into a cassette tape-recorder. When the reporter had read them, he began to understand a little more why parts of the statements had not been read out in open court. Jeremy Thorpe’s name had been mentioned in the statement, of course, and so had a prominent member of the Royal Family. Even so, the reporters were tempted to ask: “so what?”

In his summing-up at the end of the case, the judge told the jury there was no law which allowed people to shoot blackmailers.

For Courtiour and Penrose one burning question in the trial still had to be answered. It was the claim by Newton that Scott had been blackmailing him for £4 a month. But was it true?

Newton appeared to be saying that Scott had first met him in the autumn of 1974 and knew him as Andrew Newton, a pilot working for British Island Airways. However, although he claimed there had been intermittent contact for nearly a year with Scott he had suddenly decided to adopt the alias Peter Keene. So that when he had visited Scott in Barnstaple, in October 1975, he would not be recognised as Andrew Newton. He did not claim he had changed his appearance or adopted a disguise.

In the blackmail period itself, from November 1974 to October 1975, Newton claimed he had paid Scott one payment of £4, two amounts of £8 and one other payment of £8 in Barnstaple: making a total of £28.

In fact, Newton had given the police the distinct impression that he was happy to pay blackmail “hush” money if the nude photograph was not sent to his employers BIA. In which case why did Norman Scott not press callously for regular sums and altogether higher amounts?

There was little doubt that with a pilot’s salary he had sufficient income to pay larger sums to Scott. Newton had said repeatedly that Scott was an “evil blackmailer” who bragged about the enormous sums he earned from his many victims.

The pilot had told Sergeant Hinde that Scott had made a journey from Barnstaple to Blackpool to discuss the payments of £4 a month. Penrose later called British Rail. He was told by an official that the second class return train fare from Barnstaple to Blackpool would have cost £13.89 in November 1974. Assuming that Scott would have wanted a meal after his three hundred-mile journey, and probably a hotel bed for the night, his expenses for one day would have almost certainly outweighed his alleged income from Newton for the following year. If Scott was a blackmailer, the reporters felt he was astonishingly inept.

But if Newton had not made out a convincing case against Norman Scott the “blackmailer”, he was certain he said about one fact. He denied emphatically in court that he had been hired to protect Scott or to kill him.

“It is completely untrue . . . that I was paid by someone else to

dispose of Scott," he said. "At no time did I have any intention of harming Scott with the firearm. All I wanted to do was to frighten him so much that either he gave me back the photograph and the letter or he stopped blackmailing me."

One direct result of Newton's allegations that Scott was a common blackmailer was that the ex-model was arrested by police at his home in Barnstaple in November. At the Police Station he strongly denied Newton's claims. Nevertheless he was kept overnight in the cells at Barnstaple and released the next day. In turn Scott alleged that while in custody a police officer from Exeter had banged his head against the wall, demanding that he confess to the allegations that he had been blackmailing Andrew Newton.

"I told the officer that it really was beautiful the way he banged my head against the wall," Scott said. "The more I used the word 'beautiful' the more annoyed he became. But in time he just gave up."

Although they had been presented with an opportunity to charge Scott with blackmail, the police decided against it. However, several police officers in North Devon continued to believe that Scott was nothing more than a blackmailer.

Reading through the transcript of the Newton trial, Courtiour was struck by the amount of prejudice which had been voiced against Scott. Few would really question the fact that he had been given a hard time in court. He was almost tempted to agree with Scott that it was he who was being judged, not the airline pilot.

Shortly after lunch on Friday 19 March, the jury retired to consider their verdict. Was Andrew Gino Newton innocent or guilty of possessing a firearm with intent to endanger life?

Before reaching their verdict that afternoon the jury returned for advice. The foreman wanted to know more about the gun and whether it had jammed?

Newton looked agitated in the dock; his earlier self-confidence had largely vanished.

If the jury wanted to know if the gun had jammed or not they could ask a man who was sitting in court, Newton suggested suddenly. He pointed to a thick-set man with thinning fair hair: his old school pal Dave Miller.

Newton's interruption was too late and soon forgotten. The jury left the courtroom once more. When they at last returned the foreman gave their unanimous verdict: they had found the defendant guilty.

Mr Justice Lawson told Newton sternly: "This was a cunningly contrived and planned incident on your part. Had it not been for the chance of the pistol jamming, and your being unable to stop it from being jammed, the consequences of this incident might have been very, very grave indeed."

Newton could, he said, go to prison for a maximum of twenty years, but he had decided to be lenient.

The Judge went on to say: "You are a man of good character hitherto and a man who made something of your life. I am not going to impose anything like the maximum term of imprisonment."

Mr Justice Lawson sentenced Newton to two years' imprisonment.

Newton's girlfriend, Eleanor Rooney, told Penrose months later: "I had a letter from Andrew the day after he was sentenced. He was absolutely stunned. Andrew expected to get off with a suspended sentence and never thought he would be sent to prison."

Indeed Newton had been so confident of walking out of court a free man on 19 October 1976 that he had even bought a British Island Airways ticket to fly him out of Exeter airport the day the trial finished.

## Chapter 30

Police enquiries did not stop with the imprisonment of Andrew Newton. The Devon police had contacted Miller in Cardiff and asked him a few questions. Newton had pointed Dave Miller out in court at the end of his trial, saying the businessman could prove that his gun jammed after the shooting incident. But at the time the Judge had not ordered Miller into the witness box. It had been left to Chief Inspector Proven Sharpe to make further enquiries after the trial had finished. In fact the police officer had learned nothing fresh from Miller.

When Penrose and Courtiour went to meet Miller at his premises in Cardiff on 26 November 1976 he chatted freely about his long friendship with Newton. Over several meetings, Miller told them what he knew about the affair. He was convinced that there was something else behind the Newton story they had heard in court. He was a friend, but he did not believe Scott had been blackmailing Andrew. On that point he was quite certain.

For example, Newton had finally admitted to the police after his arrest that he had visited North Devon on just two occasions. Both visits had taken place, he said, in the autumn of 1975. The first visit was to Barnstaple during the weekend of 11 October. The second was on 24 October, the day of the shooting itself. But according to his friend Miller, Newton had been to North Devon on at least seven occasions before he killed the dog and turned his Mauser on Scott. Miller stressed that he had not told the police this.

The police already knew before the trial that the escaping gunman had fled to Cardiff after the incident on Exmoor. Newton had told them about going to Miller's works in the police statement he had dictated on 20 November 1975. Soon afterwards CID officers had visited Miller and questioned him.

Dave Miller admitted to the reporters that he had not been totally candid with the police officers. But at the time they had called, his friend was already in serious trouble. Why should he make it worse for him?

Miller confirmed one fact which he had told the police. Newton had arrived at his business premises on the night of the shooting, Friday 24 October.

Newton had told one of Miller's employees to say that he had been working at the works the whole evening: if he was ever asked. Miller said he was puzzled by his friend's behaviour.

"Andy was more than upset, he was angry, he went upstairs at my place and took the gun to pieces. He was mechanically minded. He wasn't an expert on guns, but he could take anything to bits and put it together again. He found that something was wrong and explained why the gun had jammed.

"I didn't tell the police all this, obviously, otherwise they would think I was involved. The gun was left at my flat in Cardiff for a time. I remember that before Andy returned to London he test-fired it in my garden. And it worked perfectly, you can still see the bullet holes." The next day, Newton had spent hours cleaning his girlfriend's car. The backseat was spattered with the blood of the Great Dane and there was a pool of blood on the floor.

Newton had said little about why he had a gun or why there was blood in Eleanor Rooney's saloon.

"But there's no doubt the gun *was* jammed on the night he turned up out of the blue," Miller said convincingly. "He rang this bloke 'Den' in London. Andy was furious, he told him on the phone he'd like to stuff it up his arse because it jammed at the wrong moment."

Miller's primary concern back in October 1975 was to get rid of the gun quickly.

"Eventually I took it to London," he said, "and put it in the shed at Andrew's mother's house in Chiswick, West London. That's where the police found it."

Back in London the reporters went to see Newton's mother. She was looking after some personal papers and his flight log books.

Mrs Newton turned out to be extraordinarily helpful and candid about her son.

"What surprises me most," she said, "is the shooting of the dog. Andrew wouldn't hurt a fly. I've seen him faint at the sight of blood from a little cut on his finger or an injection. If he was watching television and saw a doctor giving an injection he would look the other way. It's definite, I think that he's taking the rap for someone else, though I've no proof of course.

"Andrew knew nothing about guns: he never did National



Service: he was too young. I can tell you he's a miser where money is concerned. He's careful and tight. But he's not completely stupid. What happened should not have happened. I think he's been offered a great deal of money."

Penrose expected Mrs Newton to believe her son might be "taking the rap" for somebody else – mothers often could not accept their sons' guilt – but he was astonished that she could think he might have wanted to kill Scott for money, that Andrew Newton could be a hired killer.

Mrs Newton spoke about her son's girlfriends. They would be worth talking to about the affair. So Penrose and Courtiour set off for Blackpool on 19 July 1976, hoping to meet Henrietta Falconer and Eleanor Rooney. Dave Miller had insisted that Henrietta knew more about the case than she had revealed at Exeter Crown Court. He claimed he had taped a phone conversation with her where she admitted that she had never seen Norman Scott at Newton's flat in the autumn of 1974.

Henrietta Falconer agreed to meet them with her new boyfriend. Her boyfriend, an agreeable down-to-earth factory worker, spoke more freely than she did.

"Henrietta became involved in a scheme which had become too big for her," he claimed.

But how did he know that was true, asked Courtiour.

"When you live with someone you get to know a few of their secrets," he said smiling.

"Henrietta didn't know the ramifications of the affair; that's the truth of the matter."

His girlfriend agreed that Andrew Newton had misled her about one thing. When she had agreed to give evidence at his trial she had been told there would be four or five defence witnesses.

"In Exeter I suddenly discovered there was only one defence witness and that was me," she said, showing her annoyance. And she then went on to agree that she could have made a mistake about Scott: perhaps he was *not* the man she had seen at Andrew's flat in 1974.

"She's told me it wasn't Scott," said her boyfriend. And later he said that Newton had rehearsed his girlfriend in what she had to say in court. The story about the battleship which Newton and Henrietta had said under oath had fallen on the floor was an out-and-out lie.

Mrs Falconer did not contradict what her boyfriend said.

Months later Penrose returned to Blackpool. By now the reporters had met several of the pilot's girlfriends and Penrose wanted one of them to arrange for him to meet their boyfriend in Preston Prison, to which he had been transferred in the autumn of 1976. He had been asking one, Eleanor Rooney, for weeks but was told Newton would not speak with journalists. The prisoner had been quite adamant: he had nothing to say and inside was on his very best behaviour. He wanted parole as soon as possible.

Eventually the girl had capitulated.

On 21 December 1976, a prison official in A Wing at Preston agreed on the phone that some visiting orders had been held up in the Christmas post. If they turned up at the main gates he would make sure they saw Andrew Newton. Fortunately he had not asked if Penrose was a journalist.

Once inside Preston prison, the reporter feared that Newton might not speak with him, but simply turn on his heel and demand that Penrose be thrown out. When he saw the stranger sitting with his girlfriend, Newton appeared flustered, uncertain whether to take his place at the table. He glanced round at a warder, then suddenly sat down.

Penrose said he wanted to ask a few questions.

"No," Newton said flatly. "It's very difficult for me to do anything in prison. The Press are a big embarrassment to me. The reports I've had in prison whilst I'm in here virtually guaranteeing me!"

"Guaranteeing?" the reporter asked in a puzzled tone.

"Guaranteeing me," Newton went on.

"However," he added seriously, "it's got to go to Whitehall."

Penrose said he did not understand what he meant exactly. Newton was not talking like a man who had been blackmailed and had ended up in prison in an attempt to stop it.

"It has got to go to Whitehall," he repeated. "The point is, it then becomes political because if there's anything to see or any story which is at all embarrassing to anybody there's going to be a number of buyers. There's going to be someone very interested in my story not coming out.

"There's also going to be other people interested in the truth of the story," he went on. "I've nothing to say in prison.

"I've got a lot on my side which would certainly be greater than Watergate," Newton said quietly. "Watergate was just dealing with breaking and entering and lying. If I had to say anything it

would virtually wipe out one complete party to the extent of what I say."

Penrose mentioned that he and his colleague had spoken to many people inside the Liberal Party; they had been to California and talked at length to Peter Bessell, who claimed that Party supporters had hired Newton to kill Scott.

Newton smiled grimly, but said nothing for the moment.

Penrose reported a conversation they had had with a Liberal supporter. Nobody had wanted to murder Norman Scott; it was not a conspiracy, only a charade. The talk had been no more than sending someone to hell.

Newton knew who Penrose was talking about and said his name openly. It was David Holmes.

"If he makes allegations like that he'll find that he wants to advise himself on the laws of conspiracy," he said. "He's saying about the charade: it wasn't conspiracy, it was just a charade, eh? Haw, haw, haw, haw.

"Let me put it this way. When you're in court a charade is conspiracy and a conspiracy carries full marks. Mr Holmes is making these allegations: obviously he's got to think carefully. Mr Holmes is pretty naive.

"Listen, this place is full of prisoners. You've only got to talk about robbing a bank and that's conspiracy."

Newton fell back into silence, almost as if he had said too much already. He mentioned the name of another supporter of the Liberal Party he thought they should approach.

Newton's girlfriend became uneasy: the talk did not bore her, only frighten her because of its implications.

Newton had not denied to the reporter that he had been recruited to kill Scott for money.

But he had not disclosed the identity of those who had introduced him to the Liberals.

The reporter walked out of prison into the chill afternoon air. Neaby a small knot of children were singing Christmas carols. In four days' time it would be 25 December.

On the return journey to Blackpool Eleanor Rooney spoke a little more openly than in the past. Penrose kept listening, feigning undue interest in what she had to say.

Now that Andrew had been so frank and unguarded in what he had said, could she not be the same? The girl ignored the question. Penrose kept pressing the point: talk shifted from a candid insight

into events in 1975 to sudden cold empty silences. The reporter was exasperated by her alternating mood and he showed the desperation he felt. It was turning quickly into nervous rudeness. If she would not tell him the truth, what was the point of talking further? He gained the impression she did want to tell him something.

Her story was sketchy at first, hesitant, deliberately vague.

"I think Andrew in his own way might have been hoping to pick up some money," she began. "Once in 1975 he said to me, 'I know something that could put a political party out of office for ten years.' Once in September when he picked me up at Manchester Airport, he had these things in the back of his car: a survival kit and other gear.

"I asked him where he had been. He'd been to Devon: I reckon that he had been there in his own car about five times. Just surveying the countryside.

"I thought it was something illegal at first," she said softly. "I thought it was something to do with money and I thought perhaps he was doing something, a bank and somebody had found out."

The girl who up until then had believed so consistently in Newton's blackmail story now had something different to say. "I realise that it was just a load of rubbish," she blurted out with anger.

She believed that her boyfriend had been approached by people who wanted Scott harmed. "He talked about it a lot," she said. "He said he was being used by a political party because he came in at the right time. I can't tell you how he met Scott, I can't tell you. It's a confidence between Andrew and me.

"He told me over the phone once to bring my car down to London but because he needed my passport I said 'No.' He became furious with me. He said something about taking a gun to somebody: this was about two in the morning. Things had not gone as planned, everything had gone wrong. He did not know what was going to happen and he did not want me on his back. But then we went down to London and we went on holiday."

Much of what Eleanor Rooney claimed had happened seemed confused, disjointed, perhaps a reflection of her own unease about talking to an outsider. But gradually a recognisable thread did emerge from her story. Elements were repeated, often emerging with greater clarity.

"He told me that he had something," she said, "and that there

would be political repercussions. Andrew said to me that 'I know something that would put a political party out of office for ten years.' That was when he hired the car to go down to the south-west. He had, I think, been down [to Devon] in the summer, just surveying the scene. I reckon he had been down five times."

The girl was now destroying the whole fabric of Newton's court story. Newton had said he visited North Devon twice; the girl said he went down five times. Miller thought Newton went seven times.

By now the conversation was turning into a confession-by-proxy. The girl blurted out more of the story which she said Newton had forbidden her to mention. She spoke about "Den" who had given him the Mauser automatic. Once she had seen him from inside Newton's car, but she had not spoken with him. It was in London after Andrew had been arrested and released on bail.

"I think Andrew wanted to apologise to him," she said. "After all, he'd given his name to the police and Scotland Yard got hold of the man straight away. Andy wouldn't have been granted bail if he hadn't given them his name."

The description of the short stocky man who had allegedly supplied Newton with a gun was extremely useful information. Both reporters had so far failed to get a lead on him, only that he lived in London and had told the police nothing when they questioned him.

But there were other events which were also interesting. The girl spoke about a message which had arrived mysteriously at their flat near Blackpool shortly before Christmas 1975.

"Andrew got a telegram at Beech Road to phone a number. There was the time on it when he had to call. And give a girl's name, which was the codeword.

"Andrew rang the number and later came the girl's name. I can't remember the girl's name. The telegram arrived after the shooting on the moors. This was late December.

"When Andrew had the telegram it was about Christmas," she explained. "It had the code —. When he came back from phoning, Andrew said somebody wanted to meet him. And I remember the gram wasn't signed. It just said 'PLEASE PHONE.'

"He went there and then. He was only away for a few hours."

According to her, the mysterious man who had sent the telegram wanted to talk about "payment for a hit man".

"He had asked Andrew about covering his expenses. Then on another occasion there was a meeting with yet another man. I



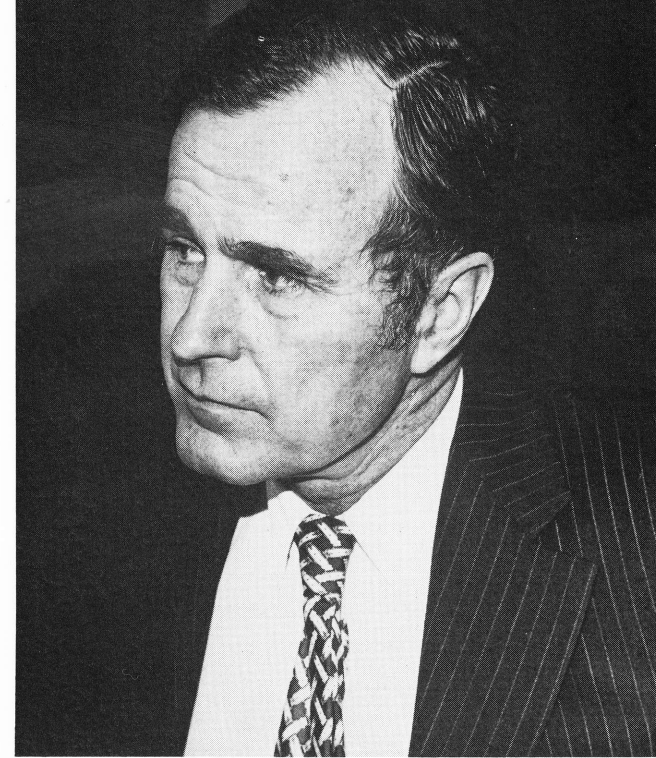
Sir Harold Wilson KG (Fox Photos Ltd)





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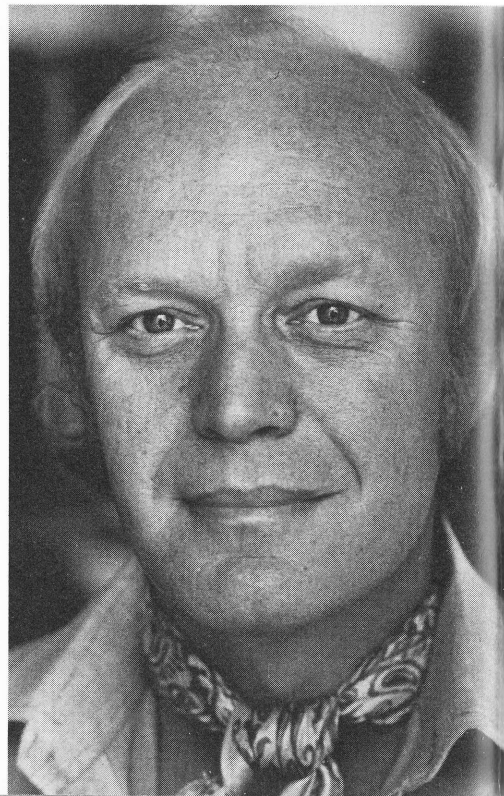


Sir Maurice Oldfield of MI6  
(*Universal Pictorial Press  
Ltd*)





Frederick Cheeseman  
*(Keystone Press Agency Ltd)*



Gordon Winter



Norman Scott





Harold Wilson, Marcia Williams and Jeremy Thorpe (*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)



Jeremy and Marion Thorpe  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)

Jeremy Thorpe with his first wife Caroline Allpass at their wedding in 1968,  
with their best man David Holmes (*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)



Peter Bessell and Jeremy Thorpe  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)





Cyril Smith, David Steel and Jeremy Thorpe (*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)

Emlyn Hooson (*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)



Lord Byers  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)



George Thomas, Speaker of the House of Commons  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)





James Callaghan at 10 Downing  
Street  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)



Sir Frank Soskice when Home Secretary. He was later to become Lord Stow Hill  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)



Marcia Williams, who was  
created Baroness Falkender  
in 1974  
(*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)

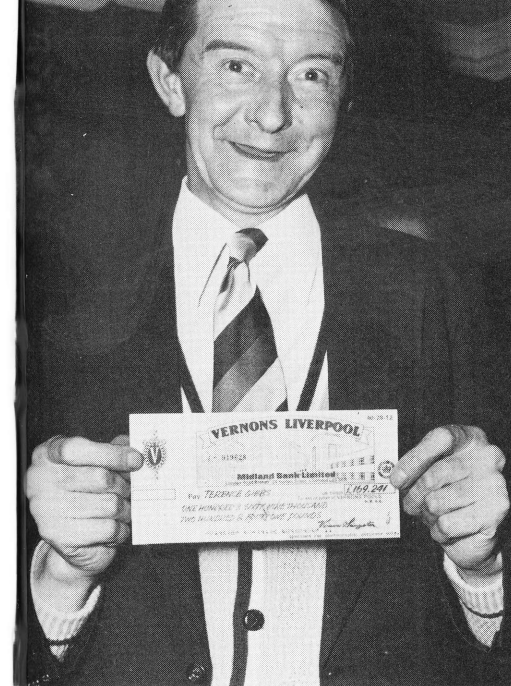


Judith Hart MP (*Keystone Press Agency Ltd*)





(Bryon McAllister, *The Guardian*)



Terence Gibbs displaying his Pools win  
(LNA Photos Ltd)



George Deakin (*Hill's Welsh Press Ltd*)



(Marc, *The Times*)



John Le Mesurier



Dave Miller

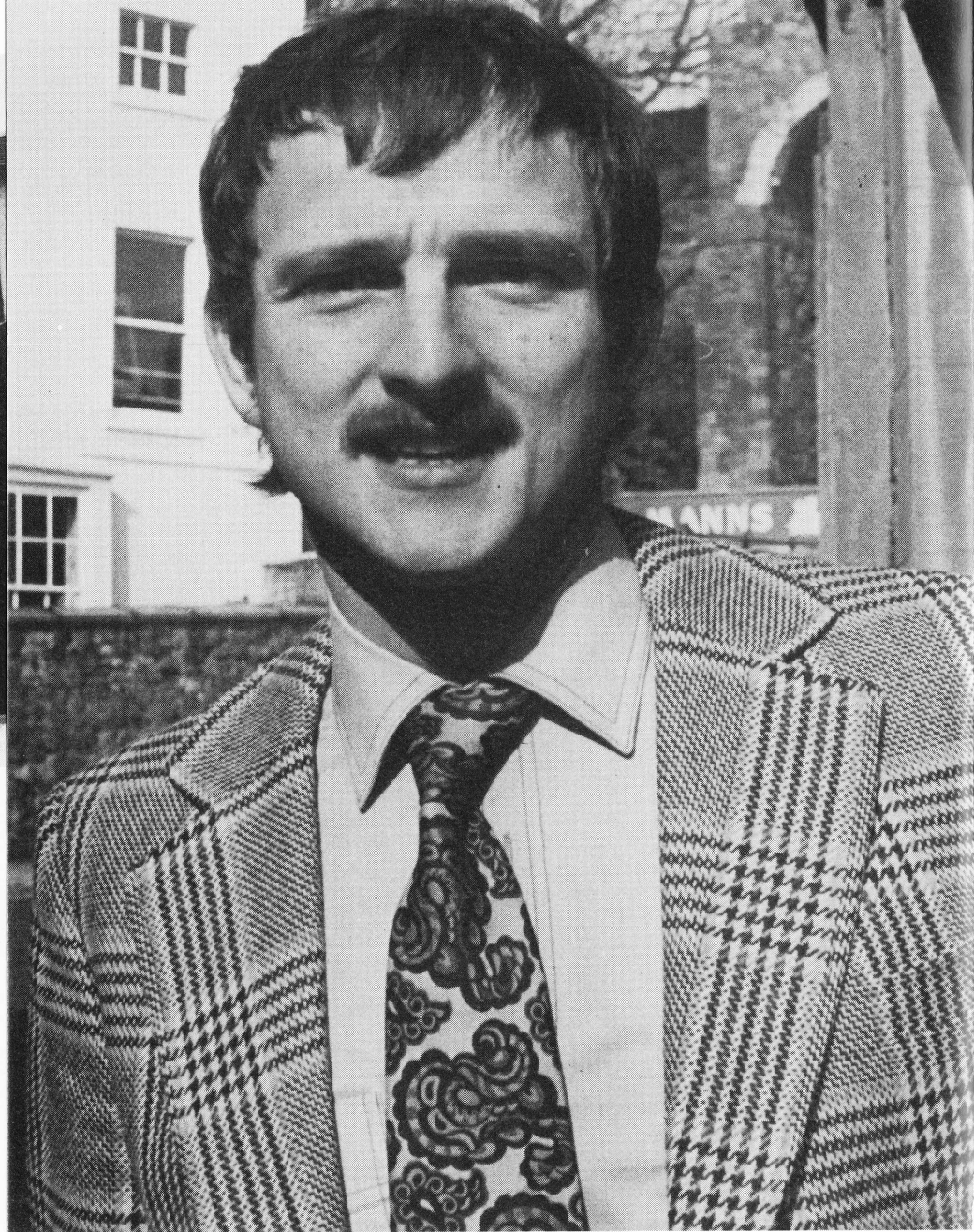


Peter Bessell photographed on the Oceanside seafront in December 1977  
with (left) Det Chief Supt Michael Challes and Det Supt David Greenough  
(*Observer*, photo Vince Streano)



Peter Bessell and the two police officers photographed entering Bessell's  
Oceanside bungalow in December 1977, followed by Courtiour (left) and  
Penrose (back to camera) (*Observer*, photo Vince Streano)





Andrew Gino Newton (*The Press Association Ltd*)

think it was at Manchester Piccadilly railway station. Andrew told me later the man was nervous. I can't remember exactly where one of the meetings took place: Bolton, Wigan, Rochdale, I really can't remember. There was one meeting in London too, I think."

There were areas, however, which she refused to discuss. If she knew where to find the man who supplied her boyfriend with a gun, she would not say.

Dave Miller knew the man had an unusual name: "Dennis Manny? Manney? Manet? Marni?"

Italian or French perhaps?

Miller said he was a real Cockey: a real "villain".

So far the police had refused to help the reporters even though they were making no more official enquiries themselves. But Penrose called Derek Braund of the Somerset police. Braund had worked on the Newton case for several months. Could Braund help them with Newton's friend "Den"? The reporter began reading from Newton's police statements and when he reached the passage where "Den" was mentioned he deliberately slurred the Christian name Dennis into "Dennis Marnee" hoping the police officer might pick him up and correct his pronunciation.

Braund fell for the ruse, mentioning the man's surname. He realised his mistake at once and laughed.

"I think I've just been conned," he said wryly. For a moment he believed Newton had put it in his police statement.

Penrose spent several hours working his way through a section of the London L-R telephone directory. After making almost a hundred calls and asking total strangers if they knew "Den" or "Dennis" the lorry driver, he struck lucky.

"Hello, Dennis?" said Penrose quietly.

"Yeah," said an obviously Cockney voice.

"I've been to see Andy Newton at his hotel in the north," said Penrose.

"Oh that screwball. What do you want?" said the voice suspiciously.

"I'd like to meet you," said the reporter.

"To tell the truth, after that last episode with him I'm not all that happy," said Dennis.

"There's nothing bent in what I want to talk to you about," Penrose said at once.

"Oh. Had a bit of trouble when I got mixed up with that fella." The voice waited for a reply.

Penrose asked him about the gun. Dennis replied that Newton had told him it had "a bit of dirt" in it.

"That's down to him," he said. "When you borrow a shooter you've got to check it first.

"All that stuff he told me sounded like a fairy tale" he went on. "I couldn't make it out. He talked about the Liberals."

"When was this?" asked Penrose.

"I'm not very good on dates," said Dennis. "Let me think: must have been the summer of '75."

"And what did he talk about?"

"He mentioned that bloke Norman Scott," he said. "Someone amongst the Liberals was being blackmailed, he said. He used to wear me earholes out with it. He offered me £1,000 to do the job myself . . . I'm telling you, a hell of a lot and I don't even know who you are! You a friend of his? Blimey, you might have been recording all this!"

Penrose told him he was writing a book and had talked with Newton in prison.

"He's a dreamer, an amateur, that bloke," Dennis said critically.

"He wanted to row me in, but I didn't want to know."

The reporter asked casually if they could meet.

"I might be rowing myself into a lot of trouble meeting you," he said slowly.

"True," said Penrose. There was no point whatsoever in denying such an obvious fact. He also knew the man's record: theft, dishonest handling, taking and driving away and several convictions in the past for assault. Once he had attacked someone with an iron bar; on another occasion he had used a double-ended spanner.

At their meeting Dennis told the reporter why he was worried.

"If anything goes wrong," he said frankly, "the Old Bill might be knocking on my door. They'd like to do me for something, especially if they think I've got away with something. Which I suppose I have. They couldn't half make my life fucking awkward."

Penrose agreed that he would not mention Dennis's surname in the book.

"Yeah, but the police already know my name: they *know* I was involved. They'll think I pulled a stroke: around here they bear grudges against people like me. Not that I earn a living out of crime, don't get me wrong."

When Scotland Yard officers had arrived at Dennis's flat in November, 1975, not long after Newton's arrest at Heathrow Airport, he was not overly alarmed.

"My gaff was clean so I didn't care about them searching it," he said, laughing at the memory. "I tell you, I couldn't understand why they let me get away with it so easily. I told them I knew nothing and they went away, as nice as that."

The ex-lorry driver began talking about Newton again. They had gone to the same school. Normally he would never have lent a "screwball" like him a gun.

"He's not one of my lot," he said, snorting at the thought. "I tell you, he only got the shooter because we went to school together. That's it. It's what you call an error of judgment."

Dennis had met Newton on several occasions in the summer of 1975. At first he could not believe that his old classmate had become a pilot. But Newton showed his papers to prove that he had become a qualified civil aviation pilot and had moved up in the world.

"But I couldn't make head nor tail of all that political talk" he said.

"He kept mentioning prominent people: and well-known supporters of the Liberal Party," he said plainly.

"Newton showed me these photographs of this bloke Scott. And he had these maps he'd drawn of Barnstaple where Scott lived and all that. Wanted me to go down there with him and do the job."

Penrose asked Dennis if he thought Newton had been lying about Scott and the plan to kill him?

"I did at first, as it happens," he replied. "I've already told you I didn't even believe he'd become a pilot at the beginning. But he kept talking about helping Mr ——. He was the man he said he was working for. He mentioned names, but I wasn't interested so I didn't take much notice.

"You see, he offered me the job. Wanted to row me in. It was £1,000. I've told you that before.

"It was a fairy tale to me at the time. I couldn't understand, to tell the truth, why these people he mentioned . . . would use a man like him. I mean, a real dreamer.

"I know a lot of people. Some are inside for armed robbery. Didn't fancy the job myself.

"Don't get me wrong. But killing ain't my game, if you know what I mean. He would keep going on about it and coming back."

A week later, Penrose called Dennis at home. He was friendly, but still troubled that he might yet end up in prison because of Andrew Newton. As a man with a criminal record including violence, he failed to understand why the police had not already charged him with supplying his old classmate with an illegal weapon. The way he had been treated by the "Old Bill" made him deeply suspicious.

Newton had turned out to be dangerous, simply because he had bungled the job. And why had Newton been granted bail by magistrates so soon after he had been arrested? £50 bail, later raised to £100 bail, made no sense for a man facing extremely serious criminal charges, especially for someone who was used to moving in and out of the country.

Dennis was apprehensive about his future. What Newton had told him and his intuition, he said, suggested that along the line many people had played a role in the Newton case. And one day the local "Old Bill" might come knocking on his door again.

Newton *had* been fortunate to get bail. He had freely admitted this to Penrose in Preston Prison. And he realised now that his two-year jail sentence had been remarkably light in the circumstances. The fact that magistrates had also allowed him to have his passport before the trial seemed remarkable. Often passports were seized by magistrates to prevent an accused person fleeing the country.

Indeed, not only did Newton have his passport returned by the police; he actually flew to America before his trial. On 14 January 1976, he had arrived in New York, travelling on a reduced-fare air ticket. He had stayed in New York for nearly three weeks attending a flying school and sitting three examinations for his American pilot's licence. The practical test he would take later, either in Britain or in the United States.

Newton was an ambitious man. In the summer of 1975 he had written off to several overseas airlines, including South African Airways whom he asked for a job based in Johannesburg. Dave Miller had kept the envelope in which the airline had replied in September 1975. A BIA stewardess in Blackpool had also known about his application to work in South Africa. But according to Miller the letter itself was missing.

In New York at the beginning of 1976 Newton was still pursuing his ambitions with no thought apparently that he would shortly have a serious conviction against his name which would handicap

his career. He was also suddenly to find his studies in America rudely and violently interrupted.

Leaving his motel one day to post a letter, Newton was hit by a truck.

As Eleanor Rooney told the story in December 1976, she had paused, realising again perhaps that the truck incident might not have been an accident. "No! Christ," she exclaimed, "I hope nobody was trying to kill him." But she dismissed the idea almost at once.

If Andrew Newton had been killed by the hit-and-run driver there would, of course, have been no trial at the Exeter Crown Court. Norman Scott would not have been called as the chief prosecution witness; no embarrassing facts, questions or rumours would have been aired in the privileged courtroom; no judge or lawyers would have been present; and no members of the Press. In fact, a total silence might well have fallen across the strange shooting on the moor.

But Newton had been relatively lucky in New York. Although it looked for a minute as if he was dead he had only been knocked unconscious. He was rushed to hospital and treated for concussion and shock but he was not badly injured, only bruised.

Altogether the weeks before his trial had not been happy ones for Andrew Newton. He had been charged with a serious crime and prosecuted for a petty fiddle over an air ticket for his friend Dave Miller, almost killed by a "runaway" truck and had lost his flying job with British Island Airways. Despite all this, the now unemployed, unpaid jet pilot was seen to retain a buoyant, cocky optimism about his fate. Throughout his trial observers were bemused by his self-confident sarcasm. It seemed strange for a man who would almost certainly end up in a prison cell, and people began to wonder why he was so confident that he would not be sentenced.

Newton's confidence before his trial in March had astonished his mother and close friends and in court he continued to display the same attitude during the solemn proceedings. In the meantime he had bragged to one BIA stewardess that he had tried to kill Norman Scott and that he had done it, as "a job for society". Did he confidently expect, therefore, that "society" would not stand by and let him be punished for what he had tried to do on its behalf?

Penrose wondered idly if the attempt to get a job in Johannesburg was a clue to the kind of society Newton was serving when he bungled his job on Exmoor. Had he intended to kill Scott and

then make his way to a new life in South Africa, perhaps taking with him the Mauser pistol and the money he would have been paid for killing the ex-model? It was a convenient theory if one were trying to dovetail the shooting incident into Harold Wilson's scenario.

But there were now several stronger indications that people connected with the Liberal Party were involved with the shooting, unless these indications were only a blind to put people off the real scent. Had Dennis, the London cockney who had supplied Newton with a gun, been misled? And had Newton's closest girlfriend been deliberately confused by the people her boyfriend had been in touch with before the trial?

For the time being the reporters could not finally make up their minds and Penrose decided he would visit Dave Miller again.

At this meeting, Miller told Penrose how he and Andy had played tricks on each other with tape-recorders.

On Saturday 21 February 1976, three weeks before Newton went on trial at Exeter Crown court, he had been staying with Miller in Cardiff. The two men had been watching television and Miller had left the room for a few minutes. Before he went, he had switched on the tape-recorder in a desk upon which the telephone was standing. Newton had been apparently quite unaware that his friend was playing tricks.

Shortly after Miller had left the room, Newton had picked up the receiver and dialled the operator. He asked for a Barnstaple number; he had difficulty getting through direct.

Miller said he could prove what he was saying. He took a crumpled telephone account out of his wallet. At the end of April 1976 he had asked the GPO for details of his account and he had been sent a breakdown of calls which had been made from his number via the operator. Penrose looked at the account carefully. Clearly listed was the date Miller had mentioned: Saturday 21 February 1976.

"But what is the significance of the number?" asked the reporter who thought he already recognised it.

"It's Michael Barnes's home number," said Miller proudly. "Andy still doesn't know I've got a recording of that conversation."

When Miller played it for Penrose, there was no doubt that it was Andrew Newton's voice.

"Good afternoon," said the voice. "Is Mr Barnes there? It's

Andrew Newton from Cardiff. I want to speak with Mr Barnes. You couldn't help me could you?

"I thought I'd do it through the channels of his solicitor. You don't know if I could speak to him [Barnes] before Monday?"

The lady to whom he spoke was either Michael Barnes's wife or their housekeeper, Miller believed. She at first did not seem to know the name Andrew Newton.

The pilot explained: "I'm an airline pilot. I think if you've been reading the papers you'll understand."

Mrs Barnes later confirmed to Penrose that there had been a conversation: but she was not the woman Newton had been speaking with.

Newton, however, had called Barnes's number again the following week. But what possible reason would he have had for calling the solicitor in Barnstaple? Did he perhaps want to enlist Barnes's help in showing that Norman Scott was a black-mailer?

Miller went on to say that he had been so intrigued by the case that he had arranged to go and see Michael Barnes after the Newton trial was over. Once the lawyer had established he was not a newspaper reporter, he had agreed to meet Miller.

When Penrose told Courtiour about the taped Newton telephone call, his colleague pointed out that it probably had no significance. It was just another odd detail. After all, Newton had claimed all along that he was being blackmailed by Norman Scott. At least he had in court, even if he had not in prison during his conversation with Penrose. Perhaps the pilot wanted Michael Barnes to help him with his defence tactics.

There was, of course, another explanation for the taped telephone calls. If Newton had been hired by South Africa to embarrass the Liberals he might have telephoned Barnes in a clumsy and unjust effort to discredit Thorpe. It was a theory the reporters could not discount.

Newton and Miller had clearly not told the reporters everything about their roles in the Scott affair. Yet while the pilot remained in prison it seemed unlikely that there would be a major break in the story.

Newton was well aware that for the moment time was on his side. He had, of course, already told Penrose, just before Christmas 1976, how he was in touch with people who wanted to buy his silence. He knew too that he could also sell his story for a large

sum of money in Fleet Street. But he might then face fresh and serious criminal charges.

In late January 1977, Dave Miller told Courtiour that he had suffered a robbery at his silk-screen works in Cardiff. His office and flat had been ransacked and material relating to the Newton case stolen. He spoke too about a visit he had had from two local businessmen.

"They came to me saying they had a message for Andrew," he said. "Could I get it to him in prison? They came in a Rolls-Royce and told me they were arranging to pay Andrew's money for the Scott job. They also said steps were being made to stop you two."

Courtior was sceptical about Miller's story. For one thing he was not prepared to give him their names. Miller also said he had not asked the police to investigate the twin robberies. He claimed he was just too frightened in the circumstances.

Newton was released from Preston prison on Wednesday 6 April 1977 and immediately disappeared again with his girlfriend Eleanor Rooney. Months later she called Penrose and said that Andrew was thinking of turning Queen's Evidence. He was already telling his lawyers about his real role in the shooting incident.

From Peter Bessell, Courtiour also heard that Newton was now prepared to tell his story. Bessell had heard the rumour from a Fleet Street journalist and he turned out to be right. On 19 October 1977, Newton's allegations appeared on the front page of the London *Evening News* under the banner headline "I was sent to kill Scott." Although Newton had asked for money, the newspaper said it had not paid him a penny for his story.

Of the shooting on Exmoor exactly two years before, Newton was quoted as saying: "You could suggest that I was sent to put the frighteners on him. But that would be wrong. It was more than that. It was the real thing.

"But I never thought I would be caught," he went on. "If I'd been working by myself I'd have been all right. But because I had to rely on others I was let down."

For example, the pilot claimed he had been handed inaccurate information about such basic facts as where Scott was living. He understood that the ex-model lived in Dunstable and over a period of two weeks he wasted time looking for him there. Only later was he told clearly that Scott lived in Barnstable.

Newton had, in fact, repeated to the *Evening News* some of the claims he had discussed with Penrose inside Preston prison.

Among them was the allegation that David Holmes had been one of the principal organisers behind the plot. But on 19 October 1977 the newspaper did not name him.

Newton had adamantly refused to name his accomplices apparently. He told *Evening News* reporters Stuart Kuttner and Joanna Patyna: "I will not be a grass. The deal was to keep quiet. I just want to leave it that way."

However, Newton had made it plain to Penrose in Preston prison that he had met Holmes months before the shooting and before his trial in March 1976. Once he had met the man at Admiralty Arch, close to the Reform Club. On another occasion a secret meeting had taken place in the crypt of a church in Bolton.

But Newton claimed that although he had been sent to kill Scott on the night of 24 October 1975, he had not had the heart to go through with it. The *Evening News* reported him as saying: "I know Scott said in evidence that I pointed the gun at his head and it jammed when I pulled the trigger. But it wasn't like that.

"I just had to hold the gun in my hand, pretending it was jamming, and cursing. Even if it had jammed I could have killed him if I'd wanted to. Scott is alive today because of me."

In fact, Newton's contention that his gun had not jammed after shooting Scott's dog flatly contradicted the reporters' own findings. The West London lorry-driver, Den, had told Penrose that Newton had complained bitterly about the gun jamming. He had obviously wanted to kill Scott at the time he said. Only the gun jamming had saved the former male model's life.

"That's down to him," Den had said, talking about his old schoolfriend Newton. "When you borrow a shooter, you've got to check it first."

His other schoolfriend, Dave Miller, also confirmed that the gun had jammed on the night of the shooting. Newton had arrived at his works that night in an extremely bad mood.

"Andy was more than upset, he was angry," Miller had said. "He went upstairs and took the gun to pieces. He spent about half-an-hour freeing the firing pin which had jammed."

And at his trial itself, of course, Newton had said that his Mauser .25 had jammed. Asked by the prosecuting Counsel: "If you had been able to unjam it, would you have fired it?" Newton replied: "Yes."

Following Newton's public statements the Director of Public Prosecutions immediately ordered a new enquiry into the case.



Admitting that they had made little progress when they had investigated the case two years before, the police now claimed they would talk to Newton and Miller again.

Faced with Newton's public allegations, Miller too now added much greater detail of what he knew. Miller spoke openly about the two Welsh businessmen he had mentioned to Courtiour and Penrose months before. Both men he said had played important roles in introducing Newton to Holmes, the man Fleet Street were to dub "the Liberal Godfather". So too had he.

Miller claimed that just before Newton was about to be released from prison he received a call from a Port Talbot businessman called George Deakin. Deakin ran an amusement arcade in Aberavon and the two men had become friends. Deakin also leased out one-arm bandit machines from a company he owned in Port Talbot called George Deakin Automatics.

According to Miller his involvement in the Scott affair began in the spring of 1975 when Deakin mentioned casually that he and a friend called John Le Mesurier were looking for a "tough guy". Other friends of theirs were being troubled by a blackmailer and they wanted someone to frighten the man enough to stop making such threats. Miller said he then introduced Newton to George Deakin. He had already told the gaming boss that his old school-friend would do practically anything for money.

"I told him that Andy would even murder someone," Miller said light-heartedly. "I wasn't serious, you understand."

Deakin, Newton and Miller met in Blackpool in early 1975 and discussed the matter in some detail. Later Newton arranged to meet Deakin again at a well-known hotel in the seaside town.

"The next I heard about it was when Newton turned up at my place on the night of the Scott shooting months later," said Miller. It was the evening of 24 October 1975.

Newton had then told his friend that he had first tried to kill Norman Scott but the attempt had failed. In a briefcase Miller saw a matchbox full of bullets, a Polaroid camera and some sheets of pink foolscap.

"Andy said he had to photograph the dead body so that his hirers knew that Scott was dead," he claimed.

Miller had already told the reporters about events on the night of the shooting. Newton had arrived unexpectedly, repaired the jammed Mauser and then given it to his friend for safe-keeping. Shortly after, Miller had taken it to Newton's mother's house in

West London where he had hidden it along with some of the sheets of pink foolscap.

However, Miller had not discussed before what he now claimed had happened early in 1977. His friend George Deakin had called him and said that the man called John Le Mesurier would be arriving to see him.

Miller again told Courtiour that he was afraid of what might now happen to him. He felt he knew too much about the background of the Scott shooting. So he made arrangements to tape-record the man's conversation when he arrived at his office.

The visitor was also a local businessman. Miller had done silk-screen work for Le Mesurier's discount carpet warehouse near Port Talbot.

It was at this meeting in Miller's office that Le Mesurier had asked that a message be passed to Newton. The businessman wanted the pilot to know that his money was available once he was released from prison. Courtiour recalled the conversation he had had with Miller months before. The two local businessmen Miller had then spoken about were obviously Deakin and Le Mesurier.

Shortly after he came out of prison in April 1977, he contacted George Deakin. Le Mesurier then called Miller in order to arrange a clandestine meeting with Newton. Le Mesurier gave exact details of when, where and how the "contract" money was to be passed to Newton.

Miller said he was to bring his friend in his works van to a lonely spot near a beach in Glamorgan, at St Bride's Common, Ogmere. Le Mesurier wanted to meet briefly at the nearby Pelican Inn and then go on to the secret rendezvous where Newton would receive his money. According to Miller "the paymaster" wanted to make sure their conversation could not be bugged. He felt an open common was therefore a safer place than the Pelican Inn.

But Miller proudly told Courtiour that every telephone conversation and meeting with Le Mesurier had been bugged. After a meeting to arrange the pay-off he had even got a professional photographer to snap the businessman leaving. But it was his tapes, he said, that proved his story was true.

In one conversation Le Mesurier could be heard discussing with Miller the £5,000 Newton is to be paid. He could also be heard asking: "One thing I want to ask you. With the five Gs, he won't go flashing it around will he?"

"I hope he isn't going to go out and dash to Savile Row and buy some flash suits and a flash car?"

Miller could also be heard asking if Newton was right in thinking he was going to be paid £5,000. "You said five? That was the arrangement? Five?"

Le Mesurier replied at once: "Oh yes. I've spoken to my friends. I thought it was more actually. 'No,' he said, 'the arrangement was five.'"

On 18 April 1977, Miller and Newton met Le Mesurier for the pay-off. The spot chosen was an isolated stretch of moorland at St Bride's, not far from the carpet salesman's home. The pilot would be paid his £5,000 in used £5 notes. It was to be the money, of course, which Newton had been waiting for since that eventful night in October 1975. Even though he had not completed his contract to kill, he would still get paid. The organisers of the plot wanted to make sure he remained silent.

Miller explained that he had arranged for a private detective agency in Cardiff to watch the rendezvous spot on pay-off day: 18 April. When Penrose called D.A.B. Services, one of their detectives, Vicki Morgan, confirmed they had been hired by Miller.

"We had four detectives watching the area," she said. "Two of our detectives saw Newton and Miller meet John Le Mesurier."

While one D.A.B. agent watched the three men through binoculars, his colleague took down the registration number of the car in which Le Mesurier had arrived. It was a Mini and the detective established later that it did belong to the businessman.

"We also had a man take colour photographs of the scene from a passing car," said Miss Morgan. "They show the three men talking together. Miller and Newton can be seen facing Le Mesurier."

In fact, the photographer in the fast-moving car so startled Le Mesurier that he jumped quickly back into his Mini. Newton stayed with the paymaster and shortly afterwards joined Miller in his van.

"Andy was still counting out £5 notes when we got back to Cardiff," Miller claimed. "They were in a brown envelope."

Shortly after Newton had re-affirmed in the *Evening News* that he was hired to kill Scott, Miller telephoned George Deakin. His friend said as far as he was concerned Newton had merely been hired to frighten off a blackmailer. He knew nothing about a murder attempt. On Miller's tape Deakin could be heard saying: "I just said a friend of mine is being blackmailed and he wants somebody to

frighten somebody. But he is to frighten him and nothing else. What went on after that I don't know because that's all I ever did and that was the end of it."

Then Deakin added confidently: "There's such a lot of people at the moment trying to hush it up still and this is genuine."

When Penrose reached George Deakin at his home in Port Talbot he admitted his role in the affair. The moment he learned that Newton had talked to the Press he had gone straight to his solicitor Barrie Stephens.

"I didn't know there was going to be any murder attempt. It was just a question of a blackmailer being warned off," he said quietly. "I'm pretty sick how it all turned out."

The reporter wanted to know how Newton had first been hired. Who was the mysterious man who had apparently turned to Mr Deakin for advice about a blackmailer?

Deakin claimed that Holmes had broached the subject of a blackmailer some three years before. The man was a financial specialist and had given him advice about income tax and equity bonds.

"I can't honestly remember when I first met the man," Deakin said. "It could have been 1973 or 1974. Anyway it was through John Le Mesurier. I also knew Dave Miller."

Deakin claimed he had discussed the blackmailer problem with the Liberal at a three-day trades fair in Blackpool in February 1975. Through Le Mesurier and Miller he had then been introduced to an airline pilot called Andrew Newton. After discussing the blackmailer with Newton he had introduced him by telephone to the Liberal. Newton seemed the right man for the job.

"I suppose I was approached by the Liberal because people in the one-arm bandit business get to know some pretty rough characters," he said. "By the way, you're the first reporter I've spoken to. You'd better have a word with my solicitor."

Barrie Stephens confirmed his client's basic story. Mr Deakin, he said, was certainly prepared to talk to the police about his role in the affair. But he would not be talking to Fleet Street.

"My client's one positive act was to put Mr Holmes, the Liberal, in direct touch with Andrew Newton," he said.

Penrose asked Stephens about his client's link with Le Mesurier and Miller.

"The only link between Le Mesurier and Mr Deakin is (a) a mutual interest in carpets and (b) that Le Mesurier introduced Mr

Holmes (the Liberal) originally to Mr Deakin. He also knows Mr Miller and I met him some time ago too," he added.

The reporters attempted to get in touch with Le Mesurier. His wife told Penrose that her husband was away on a business trip.

"John doesn't know nothing about George Deakin, Dave Miller or Mr Holmes," she said. "Or about any Liberal Party affair."

Mrs Le Mesurier quickly finished the conversation. Not long afterwards the telephone went finally dead. The line was taken out of service by the GPO on the subscriber's instructions. The reporter wrote to the businessman but heard nothing. In time, Le Mesurier's solicitors wrote to Penrose saying their client had no statement to make about the affair and did not want to meet the reporter.

At Le Mesurier's warehouse, Pyle Carpet Discount Centre, near Port Talbot, the boss was said to be sick. He was not expected to return for some time. For the moment at least John Le Mesurier had disappeared.

The reporters checked Le Mesurier's firm at Company Records Office in Cardiff. A listing for Pyle Carpets showed that a fellow director was Terence Gibbs. An employee at the discount warehouse said that Mr Gibbs had gone home. He went on, "You mean Terry Gibbs, the Pools winner?"

Gibbs wondered why Courtiour had approached him but he agreed that he knew John Le Mesurier. He also knew David Holmes. The man had once been his financial adviser. He was something of a friend.

"Mr Holmes used to visit Le Mesurier at the discount centre," Gibbs said openly. "They knew each other before they knew me. It was before I had my Pools win in 1975."

From Press cuttings Penrose discovered that Gibbs had won £169,241 from Vernons Pools on 10 May 1975. The former Welsh miner had then gone to a reception at the London Waldorf Hotel to collect his winnings. "I got the cheque from the actress Ingrid Pitt and then the money was passed into the care of Mr Holmes," said Gibbs. He told Penrose that he later learned that his financial adviser was a well-known figure in Liberal Party circles.

Holmes was a partner in a Manchester-based company called Capital Protection. The firm gave advice to people like Gibbs about where they should invest their money. According to Gibbs, Holmes had suggested he put the bulk of his fortune with a carpet salesman called John Le Mesurier. The ex-miner had agreed and

had become a co-director of the Pyle Carpet Discount Centre. It was sited inside a prefabricated warehouse.

"The wife and I wanted carpets because we'd bought a new bungalow with our winnings," he said. "The Liberal gentleman said carpets were a good investment. That's how it was."

Dave Nicholas of Vernons Pools told Penrose that he had introduced Holmes to their Pools winner Terry Gibbs.

"Actually I introduced them personally," said Nicholas. "We all met I remember in May 1975 for the celebration party at the Waldorf. I'll send you some Press photographs that were taken at the time."

In fact, and totally unknown to Terry Gibbs, David Holmes had done Le Mesurier a good turn for reasons that were not entirely financial. According to George Deakin, Le Mesurier also knew that the Liberal had problems with a blackmailer and had offered to help frighten him off. Through the combined help of Deakin, Le Mesurier and Miller, Holmes had then been put in direct touch with the would-be assassin Andrew Newton. An important part of the puzzle seemed to have been solved.

Back in London, Courtiour and Penrose went to see one of Holmes's solicitors. They met late in the evening at the solicitor's home. They read out the names of the Welsh businessmen and how they believed his client had met and spoken with Newton, something the man had always publicly denied. He had consistently said he was not the so-called Liberal "Godfather" behind the alleged murder plot. The solicitor listened without making any comment, saying he would seek his client's instructions.

Courtior asked the solicitor for a statement. He and his colleague would also like to know how the Liberal came to be discussing the October 1975 shooting on tape-recordings which Newton had made. According to Newton's solicitors, the tapes made it clear that Holmes had hired their client.

Four days later Holmes's solicitor spoke to Penrose on the telephone. He had now taken his client's instructions. If the reporters would care to let Mr Holmes read their manuscript and hear certain Bessell tapes, his client might be prepared to make a comment.

The Liberal "Godfather" had not denied he knew the Welsh businessmen and that George Deakin had introduced him to Andrew Newton. But for the time being it was strictly "no comment".

In September 1977 the reporters travelled to Brighton to meet delegates attending the annual Liberal Party conference. Penrose met a prospective Liberal candidate for one of the West Country constituencies. The two men had spoken in early 1977 about the Scott affair. But the man denied then that he knew much about it. Bessell, however, had believed he knew a good deal of the background.

After a long conversation the man asked Penrose if he always had to name people who gave him information. He said no.

"You see, I knew about Newton and that he was a pilot before the business on the moors," he said.

Penrose asked if he had protested at the time.

"You know, I never thought such mafia-like tactics would ever be used," he replied. "There was no point in banging the table at anybody. It doesn't work like that."

The Liberal candidate went on to add that so many weird events had taken place in 1975 and the early months of the following year. One night a girl had knocked on his bedroom door at the National Liberal Club. It was three o'clock in the morning.

"She had some wild idea about recovering some tapes which Richard Wainwright had," he said. "Bessell had talked to Wainwright and Richard had recorded them."

The Liberal suggested he talk to Susan Clarke. She was the girl who had talked to him about the Wainwright tapes.

"Yes, I talked to — about those tapes," Miss Clarke readily admitted to the reporter. "Wainwright apparently wanted to make them public. They could have proved embarrassing, especially as there were a number of by-elections coming up at the time."

"I said quite openly that we'd have no problem getting them back from Wainwright," she continued. "I didn't think he'd protest if they went missing. Frankly he wouldn't want it known he'd been taping conversation. Several people were very concerned about the tapes."

By a remarkable coincidence Richard Wainwright had earlier lost his own file of papers on the Scott affair. The MP had been aware of Scott for some years. Peter Bessell had given him some of the background to it in the late 1960s. He had also witnessed a bizarre incident at the House of Commons when another young man had suddenly arrived. Bessell had asked him to look after that particular situation and save the party any embarrassment.

"I don't know anything about people wanting my tapes,"

Wainwright told Penrose, who had read a transcript of the tapes. "But I did lose my Scott file. Somebody took it one morning from my room at the Commons. It was on 21 February 1976."

Wainwright went on to explain what had happened. "It was my own fault," he said. "I was only absent from my room for a minute but when I came back it had gone."

Penrose asked the MP why he left a sensitive file of papers in an unlocked room.

"I placed some faith in the total chaos of my desk," he answered. "I'd concealed it under a bundle of papers. You see MPs aren't provided with a secure place at Westminster."

\* \* \*

The reporters were now becoming irritated by the smaller details of the story; they wanted to solve finally the most important riddles which still remained. Why, for instance, had Harold Wilson resigned at the time he did? Was the resignation linked with the wider implications of the dog-in-a-fog affair?

The reporters had by now established the connection between the two surprise resignations in early 1976: the Prime Minister's departure from Number 10 in April and Mr Thorpe's decision to resign in May. Could these two events, and the bizarre circumstances leading up to them, have come to the notice of the South Africans and the "mafia section of MI5" which Sir Harold had so often complained about? Were indeed the efforts in Britain and America to make the Scott story public hitting at the Labour Prime Minister where he was thought to be most vulnerable? Penrose and Courtiour agreed that this argument, implausible at the beginning of their investigation, now seemed increasingly possible.

Resignation had certainly occupied the Prime Minister's thoughts in 1975. According to Lady Falkender, Sir Harold had considered resigning from office as far back as the spring of that year. But he had constantly changed his mind about the subject. For the time being he decided he would stay in power.

"At one stage he was quite adamant that he would resign at the Labour Party Conference in October 1975," she said. "But he changed his mind and said Christmas would be a good time to go."

Lady Falkender added that she got the date deferred until Christmas. "I then went to see him at Christmas and told him it

would be lunatic to leave then," she said plainly. "He tried to manoeuvre me around saying that I would not persuade him to put it off again. He told me: 'I shall go in March.'"

Exactly why the Prime Minister felt so pressed to leave office Lady Falkender still does not fully understand. In any event he informed the Queen of his decision to resign in the New Year on 9 December 1975. Sir Harold told the Queen that no firm date had yet been fixed. It turned out to be Tuesday 16 March, the same day that Princess Margaret's royal marriage ended and exactly the same day as Newton's trial opened in Exeter. Many saw in these three simple facts something more than mere coincidence.

Penrose had already asked the Prime Minister about the circumstances which linked them together. Sir Harold had at first ignored the question. He had changed the subject, but the reporter returned to the question. It was again ignored.

"Did you get anything from this man Gordon Winter?" Sir Harold asked the reporters, referring to the South African journalist.

"Winter said that the events around the resignation were linked with South Africa and with the Liberal Party," said Penrose. "He insisted the two things were closely associated."

"In other words the same blackmailer who did Jeremy would also do me?" enquired Sir Harold, referring to Scott.

"But there is no link?" asked Penrose, wondering if he was perhaps being too sharp. "We can discount that there is any link between the Liberal Party and your resignation?"

"Yes," said Sir Harold quietly. "The only connection with the Liberals is that if Jeremy had gone, let us say, in February or March [1976], and I was fighting on for my own reasons; they would have linked my going with his. There was a double scandal! They would have said his homosexual partner the Prime Minister, or something like this. And Mrs Thatcher would have said: 'They're all going!'"

The ex-Premier explained how he had made his decision.

"When I wrote down a few little arguments as to whether it should be February or March or April or May," said Sir Harold, "I had to take Jeremy into consideration. One of the notes I wrote down was about Jeremy. If Jeremy went it would preclude my going."

Sir Harold had gone on to say that he wanted to avoid what he called "unsettlement" inside the Labour Party. A Party with a

Prime Minister about to resign as its leader is weakened necessarily by uncertainty. Such an important moment could easily affect the next General Election.

The reporters later turned to Lady Falkender in an attempt to find out more. Was the timing of the Resignation announcement, the break-up of the Royal Marriage and the Newton Trial date just a matter of coincidence?

"The moment they got the knowledge that Harold was leaving how do we know they didn't shift all their positions then to match that event?" replied Lady Falkender. "Not just in relation to the Palace but in relation to the whole political scene."

Lady Falkender had told the two reporters that Sir Harold had volunteered to resign. "He was just helping the Palace over a difficult situation," she said grimly. "I told him you can't possibly do that, what you are doing is a big moment in history. It's bad enough having to cope with Jeremy, you don't have to do this as well."

Lady Falkender continued: "I feel very strongly about that, a man at that level: eight years as Prime Minister: and in my view a very great one; has his retirement on the same day as Princess Margaret's separation!" She clearly felt that Sir Harold's resignation which she saw as a great moment in history had been marred by his agreement with the Palace.

Penrose and Courtiour were far more concerned with other unanswered mysteries than the passing involvement of Buckingham Palace in the story. A senior police officer from Devon investigating the Newton-Scott shooting in 1975 had told the reporters later that he had not been officially encouraged to contact Peter Bessell in California. It was just one of several examples where the police had been inhibited by Whitehall from trying to solve a crime. To the reporters the story had far too many political implications it seemed for some people in high places to want the truth to emerge. Ordinary justice, it seemed, had become dangerously entangled in a sinister web. Thus affairs of state had in that sense put democracy at risk.

## Chapter 31

By the summer of 1977 Penrose and Courtiour were still particularly anxious to discuss their latest findings with Harold Wilson. Through his Political Secretary they had informed him of the allegations of a murder plot and of those who were said to have planned it, on the eve of the Lib-Lab pact in March. Now the reporters wanted the opportunity of discussing the political ramifications of what they had discovered.

After several weeks' delay Lady Falkender arranged for the reporters to meet Sir Harold at his new home in Ashley Gardens, an apartment block overlooking Westminster Cathedral.

But the day before the meeting Peggy Field called Penrose at his home. There had been, she said, a last-minute hitch.

"Marcia would like to discuss it with you here at the Mews. It's urgent. Could you come to London at once?"

That same afternoon the reporters learned that the ex-Prime Minister had suddenly been advised not to meet them again. Lady Falkender explained some of the background to what had happened only a short while before.

According to Lady Falkender, Harold Wilson had been invited to the Speaker's Dinner, given in honour of the Queen, on 4 May. It was being held at the Commons to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. Many prominent figures from the British political establishment had also been invited.

"There were four former Prime Ministers going," she said. "Harold Macmillan, Lord Home, Edward Heath, and, of course, Harold. Jim Callaghan was also going to be there."

The Opposition leader, Margaret Thatcher, was invited. So too was the Liberal leader David Steel and Lord Byers, the leader of the Liberal peers.

"They're all names who've come into the story at one time or another," said Courtiour. "What happened?"

"Harold had dressed early for dinner," Lady Falkender went on. "He found he had some time on his hands before the 8.30 dinner.

He then remembered that Jeremy Thorpe had asked to see him but he had no idea why."

The former Prime Minister had then walked along the North Curtain corridor to Mr Thorpe's room: 47a. He found the room empty. Shortly afterwards he returned to hear the Liberal MP talking loudly on the telephone. Once the conversation ended Sir Harold knocked on the half-opened door and went in.

"Jeremy wanted to see him about the United Nations Association," Lady Falkender said. "Both had been honorary presidents. They talked about nothing else."

"And?" asked Courtiour. "What's happened to our meeting?"

"Well, later Harold also saw Lord Goodman," she answered. "He said he felt it would be better if Harold didn't see you again."

"Because of the allegations of a murder plot?" said Penrose.

Lady Falkender nodded her head. She said that Lord Goodman did not want Harold to be subpoenaed as a witness in any court proceedings. If his client did not read the material she had seen, he could probably escape that risk.

"Arnold also asked where you two were getting your resources from after you parted company with the BBC," she continued. "He asked if Harold had considered the possibility that funds might be coming from South Africa."

Lady Falkender excused herself, saying she was only repeating what Harold had told her. She personally did not believe they were working for South Africa.

"But who are your publishers?" she asked quickly. "Harold didn't know. Nor do I."

On 10 May the reporters returned to Wyndham Mews with their publisher Tom Rosenthal. From the time they had left the BBC he had taken a close interest in their investigation. He had also supported them financially.

But apart from the BBC's Director-General, who had seen Rosenthal's name in their Red File notes, few people knew their publisher's identity. Rosenthal from the beginning had asked that his publishing house remain unnamed. He wanted, he said, for as long as possible to avoid any outside pressures not to publish. He had drawn his own conclusions from some of the events which had taken place at the BBC.

Lady Falkender went over the same ground again with Rosenthal. The publisher assured her he had no connections with South

Africa, apart from publishing books by writers hostile to the apartheid régime.

"But, you see, Harold has spoken to Lord Goodman," interrupted the Political Secretary. "Arnold just thinks it wise if Harold didn't see them again. In view of the material they've collected."

A week later, 17 May, Rosenthal arrived – at Sir Harold's request – at Ashley Gardens with a similar mission. He wanted to convince the ex-Prime Minister that he had no sinister South African connections. At first the two men spoke about the world of books and the paintings of L. S. Lowry. Sir Harold had one on his wall. The conversation turned only gradually to Lord Goodman, and the investigation.

Courtiour and Penrose waited inside Westminster Cathedral. They had arranged with Rosenthal that if Harold Wilson agreed to see them they could join him at once.

"I gave Sir Harold all the assurances that were necessary," Rosenthal whispered – a Mass was just starting. The three men left the Cathedral and, a hundred yards away, saw Harold Wilson getting into his chauffeur-driven black saloon.

"But did you convince HW about the South African idea?" Courtiour asked. "Will he meet us again?"

"Arnold Goodman was apparently adamant that he shouldn't see you," Rosenthal answered. "But Sir Harold did say you could keep in indirect touch with him through Lady Falkender."

The ex-Prime Minister's suggestion was no more than they had been doing already. But it was far from being a satisfactory solution.

In fact, the reporters were to see Harold Wilson on one more occasion. On 1 July 1977 the reporters had arranged to meet Lady Falkender at Wyndham Mews. As they arrived promptly at six o'clock Sir Harold and his wife were just leaving for a weekend at Great Missenden. The statesman appeared cheerful and asked about the latest developments. That information from the Trans-World News Service in Washington, he said, sounded interesting. The conversation then swung to MI5 and MI6. The alleged murder plot was not mentioned.

"Keep Marcia informed of everything," he said hurrying off towards his saloon car.

Throughout July the reporters kept in close touch with Sir Harold's Political Secretary. The *Observer* had acquired serialisation rights in their book that spring and wanted to use some of the material before publication. They were especially keen to disclose

Sir Harold's doubts about MI5. The murder conspiracy claims around Scott could wait until later.

The reporters arranged for the newspaper's editor, Donald Treford, and his defence correspondent, Andrew Wilson, to meet Lady Falkender and then Harold Wilson to discuss matters. The *Observer* wanted reassurance that the former Prime Minister had expressed such views and continued to hold them.

On 13 July, Treford and Andrew Wilson questioned Lady Falkender at Wyndham Mews.

"Do you believe that the attitude of MI5 indicates a good deal of inefficiency and a certain kind of in-built conservatism?" Treford asked. "And mistrust?"

"Oh, we're quite convinced there is hostility in certain groups," said Lady Falkender. "Harold feels this very strongly."

Treford was sure that people would ask why the former Prime Minister had not set up an enquiry when he was still in power. Why had he talked to Courtiour and Penrose rather than go through political channels?

"If the Prime Minister, who was Prime Minister for a very long time, left office believing that about the Security Services, then I think it's a matter of very considerable importance and should come out," said Treford.

The *Observer* Editor was convinced the story would provoke widespread comment. Sir Harold would obviously be asked questions in the House. The fact that he held great suspicions about MI5 would be taken extremely seriously; also the fact that he had privately contacted the CIA while still in office. But why hadn't he set up questions in the House, Treford asked again.

"How could Harold do that?" replied Lady Falkender. "The only people qualified to provide the evidence, and present the case for an enquiry, were the same people who are part of the thing that is wrong. So the Prime Minister couldn't do that."

Penrose said that Harold Wilson had made clear to them in May 1976, when they were still at the BBC, that he wanted a Royal Commission to look into the whole matter. He was aware of the reaction his allegations would create. Lady Falkender agreed, adding that they were all prepared for the storm that would no doubt follow.

From the ex-Prime Minister, Treford and Andrew Wilson learned at first hand that he had indeed expressed grave reservations about his Security Services. He did believe that there had



been a vendetta against himself and members of his staff and Government. He wanted a top-level enquiry.

Beginning on 17 July 1977, the *Observer* ran the first of several articles. Under the front page headline "Wilson: Why I lost my faith in MI5", the story began: "Two ludicrous blunders and what Sir Harold saw as a constant whispering campaign against himself, his personal entourage and Labour Ministers led the former Prime Minister to doubt the competence and loyalty of MI5 during his premiership."

Rarely did Fleet Street discuss the British Secret Service, either its work or its efficiency. Never before had an ex-Prime Minister talked so openly to two journalists about such highly delicate matters of State. Such revelations caused immediate amazement and alarm, inside and outside Parliament.

On 18 July the Labour MP, Gwilym Roberts announced that he was tabling a Parliamentary question to Mr Callaghan demanding a Select Committee enquiry. Other MPs said they would do the same. One of them was Brian Gould, Labour MP for Southampton.

"Sir Harold reveals at best incompetence at MI5 and at worst something more sinister," Gould told Penrose on the telephone. "We really must know which interpretation is correct."

Chapman Pincher in the *Daily Express* added to the MI5 controversy by claiming on 29 July: "Spy men kept a Premier taped: Wilson was bugged at No 10." Pincher went on to say that American and British Security men had placed the Prime Minister under electronic surveillance. The former Prime Minister and some of his colleagues, he said, had not been wholly trusted by MI5 and the CIA. If true, Pincher's story confirmed some of Harold Wilson's worst fears.

In a statement to the Press Association on 30 July, Sir Harold said: "Mr Chapman Pincher has long been known to have had close contact with certain of the officers of the Security Service, and I have known him long enough to be sure that whatever his sources – right or wrong – he would not print such a story if he did not believe it.

"Since contrary to everything known to me and my Number Ten and Cabinet Office advisers, he is confident of his facts, it is essential that the information in his possession must be made available to, and fully investigated by, the Home Secretary."

The *Times* and other newspapers called for a top-level Government enquiry. One correspondent, George Hutchinson, suggested "Three Just Men who can get at the truth behind the security row". Hutchinson argued strongly that Sir Harold's complaints should be fully investigated: "What he [Wilson] has said was not said by chance or accident, but deliberately: he is not the unoffending victim – the innocent casualty – of some awful misunderstanding. He did what he meant to do. He set out to disparage, decry and belittle the intelligence departments – *for publication*. A public row was bound to follow."

At the House of Commons the Opposition leader, Margaret Thatcher, said that Harold Wilson had broken with tradition in speaking of security matters during the time he was Prime Minister. It was a very grave matter.

Mrs Thatcher told Parliament: "And the Attorney-General may also wish to make a statement."

During the debate on 29 July, Mr Callaghan made the briefest intervention. He did not immediately call for a Royal Commission or a Select Committee enquiry to examine the affair. He made it clear that he could not answer for what his predecessor might or might not have told Courtiour and Penrose or anybody else.

As far as he was concerned he said the British Security Services were "at present properly conducted". For the moment he was not prepared to answer any further questions. The House knew that matters relating to Security Services were rarely discussed in Parliamentary debates.

But Mrs Thatcher had gone on to ask Mr Callaghan: "May I therefore take it that you are refusing to question the previous Prime Minister as to whether or not he gave an interview to two journalists affecting the Security Services?"

Mr Callaghan was reluctant to extend the heated exchange and he strode out of the Chamber. At 3.20 pm the House rose after an uninterrupted sitting of nearly twenty-five hours.

Throughout the debate over the Secret Service row Harold Wilson was not in the Chamber.

According to those around him, Sir Harold was hoping for support, both inside and outside Parliament.

"We're prepared for it," Lady Falkender said as the reporters left Wyndham Mews late one evening. "We all knew it was coming. So did Harold."

From his Political Secretary the reporters heard that the former

Prime Minister had been disappointed that Mr Callaghan had not set up an immediate enquiry. He had expected his successor would rally quickly to his support. Relations between the two most senior Labour Party figures were not as close as some might have believed.

Yet Harold Wilson continued to express his concern about MI5 that summer outside Parliament. He told the *Observer* in a Press statement on 28 August: "My impression is that what has been going on over a period of years has come from or been fed by, a small mafia group of MI5 who have contacts outside in one or two sections of the Press, and a few self-appointed private enterprise security agents."

But if Harold Wilson was discouraged by the new Prime Minister's response, Mr Callaghan also had possible reasons for recriminations. The Lib-Lab pact which kept Mr Callaghan's Government in power was now in danger from new revelations about the Scott affair. And Sir Harold had chosen in March not to inform his successor about secrets which might sabotage the agreement struck by the Labour and Liberal Parties at Westminster. Once again, if the Liberals were greatly damaged the Government could fall as an indirect result.

When the reporters spoke to David Steel and his aides, Emlyn Hooson and the Chief Liberal whip Alan Beith, they all seemed only too conscious of the awkward predicament they faced that autumn. The reporters now told them in detail about the alleged murder plot. They asked for a Press comment. Would the Liberals now open an enquiry into the whole Scott affair?

"What do you expect us to do, Barrie?" asked one of Steel's aides with exasperation. "We're going to hang on as long as possible."

Meanwhile there were further disclosures about the alleged murder conspiracy. Newton had just spoken of his role in the plot to kill Scott. In the *Observer* on 23 October Penrose and Courtiour disclosed part of what Peter Bessell had told them in America exactly a year before: "In a series of conversations with us in California last October, Peter Bessell had given an extraordinary account of what he said was an earlier plot against Scott – nearly nine years ago. He described meetings he said he had in late 1968 at which ways of killing Scott were discussed.

"Bessell, who says he was horrified at the suggestion that murder might be on the cards, told us that apart from describing

such plans as 'diabolical', he raised doubts about how Scott's body could be disposed of.

"I pointed out that it would take a couple of strong men to dig a six-foot grave, and that, unless it was done properly, the body was likely to be found.

"X then suggested weighting it and dropping it into a river. Again, I said this needed a couple of people and, moreover, it would be hard to find a deep-water river that was not surrounded by wharves, factories or houses."

"Although Bessell has since hedged in public about the murder plot story, less than a month ago he gave us a sworn affidavit to the effect that all the information and evidence he had given us earlier was true.

"X said he had read that a body had been put in the rubble where a new expressway was being built in America, and it had been automatically covered by the cement machine the next day,' Bessell told us.

"I pointed out that if he had read this it only proved that the body had been discovered. I believe it was at this point that I tried to change the subject, but cannot recall what I talked about, although it must have been something to do with Cornwall because X interrupted me, almost shouted: "A tin mine."

"Ridiculous idea."

"Bessell has told us that the man we must refer to as X suggested to him that David Holmes be instructed to kill Scott. This allegation, one of the gravest he made during several hours of conversations, is among those covered by his recent affidavit.

"I said the idea was ridiculous,' Bessell said. 'Holmes would not do it. X did not reply to this but said there was no one else, as clearly neither he nor I could do it.

"I heartily agreed with his last statement and hoped that now having come up against an insuperable obstacle, X might be about to abandon the idea of murder. But I was wrong."

"At a later meeting, Bessell said, the project was again discussed. The murderer was to pose as a German magazine reporter, get Scott drunk 'and at a convenient spot on Bodmin Moor, it would be easy to kill the drunken Scott'.

"I asked about a weapon. X had thought of that – it would have to be a revolver. I pointed out that the noise would be dangerous, and in any case where would he get one? I believe I also said it was impractical, since apart from the noise there was the problem of blood.

“Sense of humour.

“The murderer could hardly carry a blood-stained body to a mineshaft without leaving a trail, since Scott was a large man and would have to be dragged.

“All right, said X, it would have to be poison. The murderer would have to slip it into Scott’s drink at the pub. Someone else present at the meeting had a sense of humour and remarked that it would look odd if Scott fell off the bar stool stone dead.

“X said he was sure there was a slow-working poison and it was only a matter of research.’

“But within a few months, Scott had got married and according to Bessell, all thoughts of murdering him were dropped. If Newton was to be believed, they revived it eight years later.”

When Penrose decided that same weekend of 23 October to ask Harold Wilson for a comment he did not expect an answer. The reporter was only too aware that the former Prime Minister had been advised not to speak with him, especially about the alleged murder plot.

But he was in luck. Harold Wilson answered the telephone at his home at Great Missenden. He appeared friendly and agreed to give the reporter a brief Press statement.

He said: “I had no idea that one of the outcomes of the investigation would be an alleged murder plot involving Liberals. When the enquiry began in May last year I wanted my South African allegations investigated. I only learned about the alleged murder plot some weeks ago.”

The reporters had passed their detailed information about the alleged murder attempt to him in March 1977. Sir Harold did not disguise his sadness about the way the investigation had turned about. Although his fears about the Security Services had now been brought out into the open, he was unhappy about the latest Scott disclosures.

Disquiet was also felt elsewhere. On 25 October the *Daily Mirror*’s front page reflected widening Fleet Street concern: “The Norman Scott affair is casting an ugly shadow over British public life. It gets bigger every day. It is high time it was resolved. Once and for all.”

On Thursday 27 October Jeremy Thorpe held a Press Conference at the National Liberal Club. Late that afternoon crowds of Press and TV-men were kept outside the Victorian building by police and security guards.

The Liberal MP Clement Freud, who had agreed to chair the conference, had earlier given firm instructions that only selected journalists would be allowed inside. Cameras and tape-recorders were banned.

Penrose and Courtiour slipped into the Club but were stopped by officials on the third floor where the Press conference was to be held. The *Daily Mail* reported the next morning: “Barrie Penrose and Roger Courtiour who are about to publish *The Pencourt File* . . . were left unhappily staring through the windows of a barred door.”

Fortunately a colleague, who was allowed in, successfully tape-recorded Mr Thorpe reading out his prepared statement and the question and answer session which followed.

That night Penrose listened to the tape. Mr Thorpe reminded the assembled journalists how he had first met Norman Scott. He said: “When he called on me at Westminster late one afternoon in 1961 Scott was down on his luck and I felt genuinely sorry for him . . .” He then stressed: “I was at no time a party to any form of cover-up or attempt to put pressure on Scott.”

Mr Thorpe also spoke briefly about his relationship with the former male model. He now said that there had been “a close and even affectionate friendship” with the young man. However, he stressed that “no sexual activity of any kind ever took place”.

In his statement the MP referred to Andrew Newton’s recent allegations. He said: “I do not know Mr Newton. I have had no direct or indirect communication with Mr Newton. I have made no payment to Mr Newton. I have no knowledge of any payment being made to Mr Newton and of any arrangement made by anyone to pay Mr Newton.”

The question-and-answer session which followed the prepared statement lasted for more than an hour. The politician had already complained about the intolerable strain the re-emergence of the story had placed on his wife, family and himself. But he would not, he said, resign his seat in Parliament.

A BBC reporter, Keith Graves, had then asked: “Have you ever had any homosexual relationship?” Marion Thorpe interrupted angrily: “Go on – stand up and say that again.”

Mr Thorpe’s lawyer said that in his view it was an improper question for a public figure to be asked.

Mr Thorpe did not answer the reporter’s question, adding calmly: “That is not the major allegation. The major allegation is that there was a Liberal hired to murder a man.”

Penrose then heard the BBC reporter say: "Because he was allegedly having a homosexual relationship with you."

But Mr Thorpe replied at once: "It may be that our priorities are different. It has been alleged that a man was hired to murder somebody. That is a very, very serious crime."

Rarely had such a prominent politician been placed under such distressing public interrogation. The *Daily Express* caught some of Fleet Street's sympathy the next morning with their front-page headline, "Thorpe's Agony".

Three weeks after the Press conference Penrose telephoned Jeremy Thorpe at the House of Commons. Since their chance encounter in Devon the previous year the reporters had not spoken with the MP. Now Mr Thorpe's confidential secretary, Judy Young, took down several questions which she promised to pass on. Later that afternoon Penrose was given a message. Mr Thorpe would not meet the reporters and neither would he make any comment to them.

The reporters wanted to know if the Liberal MP agreed with Harold Wilson's claims about South Africa's active role in the Scott affair. It was one of the questions they had tried to put to him months earlier.

At his Press conference Mr Thorpe had said: "Regarding the alleged South African connection, Sir Harold Wilson informed me of his view, which he had publicly stated in the House of Commons, that the matter arose from South African instigation of a non-governmental character. I had no reason to disbelieve this coming from so authoritative a source." However, Mr Thorpe added: "I did not myself promote this belief."

From his Press statement the MP appeared to dismiss the South African connection. Apart from the information about Wyatt and Kamil which he had passed to the Prime Minister in February 1976, he had no evidence about any foreign interference. As far as he was concerned, the whole Scott affair had grown largely out of his former friend's instability. It was, he said, the character of Norman Scott and his "incredible reactions" that had caused him and his Party such embarrassment.

With Mr Thorpe and others now discounting a South African role in the story, some commentators were already asking pointed questions about Harold Wilson's motives in the complex affair. Why had the Labour Premier made that speech about South Africa in March 1976?

In the *Daily Express* Chapman Pincher asked on 20 October: "Was there a big Westminster cover-up to save Jeremy Thorpe from being forced to resign the Liberal leadership?"

"This question arises following a decision by the police to re-open the case in which Andrew Newton, a former airline pilot, threatened the life of male model Norman Scott after shooting his dog."

In view of what they had discovered more than a year before, such thoughts had obviously occurred to Courtiour and Penrose. Had there really been a "strong South African participation in recent activities relating to the leader of the Liberal Party," as Harold Wilson had stated so emphatically in the House of Commons? Could the Scott affair still be partly explained in terms of "massive reserves of business money and private agents of various kinds and qualities" again as had been claimed?

When Lady Bacon first heard of the 9 March 1976 speech in the Commons she said she went to warn Harold Wilson about what she knew of the background of the Scott affair.

"I was with Harold almost the day after he'd made the statement in March," she told Penrose on the telephone in the autumn of 1977. "I thought oh my golly! Just remember what happened with the Home Secretary and the Speaker George Thomas in 1965."

"I said to Harold: 'Oh do be careful.' I think it was in the tea room at the Commons. I thought well, it's going to look a bit peculiar if this all comes out in public and Harold didn't know and is proved wrong."

Penrose asked the former Minister of State at the Home Office if she had ever spoken to Harold Wilson about the Scott affair before? Had she informed him twelve years before?

"I didn't mention it to him in 1965," she said. "It was up to somebody else to do that at that time."

Despite everything they had discovered the reporters could still not entirely dismiss the former Prime Minister's claims about South Africa. For one thing they had been told by a former chief of the British secret service that BOSS did interfere politically in the UK.

Moreover, there was also an underlying logic to the claims which the ex-Prime Minister had always made. South Africa had no reason whatsoever to like political figures such as Harold Wilson and Jeremy Thorpe or their political parties. Both men shared a common detestation of the South African régime and its apartheid policies.

So too, of course, did others who had entered the story: among them Barbara Castle, David Ennals, David Steel, and the present Speaker of the House of Commons. Edward Heath too, was no close friend of South Africa's Nationalist Government and he had become aware of the Scott allegations and their political implications. From Pretoria, politicians like Mr Heath appeared far too liberal to be a really Conservative Prime Minister.

In fact, if BOSS had been searching for a means to discredit selected British politicians – to “neutralise” them as Tony Eaton had put it in Washington – the Scott affair demonstrably provided South Africa with a unique custom-built opportunity. BOSS dossiers would undoubtedly include the names of those who were hostile to South Africa at the most critical moment in its history.

Harold Wilson had argued publicly that Britain was still the most influential voice in southern Africa. Rhodesia and South Africa therefore had much to gain from the Labour Government and its Liberal allies losing office.

The former Prime Minister had told the reporters at Lord North Street: “A Tory Government at Westminster would show far greater sympathy for the white minority régimes than any Labour Government.”

Nor could the reporters dismiss what they had discovered about the activities of men like Tony Eaton and Gordon Winter. Both had played significant roles in the Scott affair and both claimed links with Western intelligence agencies.

Others, too, had tried to turn the Scott story to their own advantage. Even Andrew Newton had applied to live in South Africa both before and after the Exmoor shooting in October 1975. Was this too a mere coincidence along with so many other enigmas?

According to his schoolfriend Dave Miller, Newton had been promised more than just £5,000 to kill Scott. There was also the matter of his future. And that was to be in southern Africa.

“When Andrew went to Johannesburg in order to get into Rhodesia in October 1977 he told me it was for the second part of his pay-off,” Miller told Penrose. “The organisers had promised him five grand and a well-paid job over there.”

When Newton had eventually arrived in Rhodesia, said Miller, he had been kept in detention for seven days. The Salisbury authorities believed he was wanted for questioning by the British police. After a week in custody he flew back to London. The

airline pilot was apparently bitter about his experience. The man he was told to contact in Rhodesia claimed he knew nothing about a job for him. Nothing about the alleged murder pay-off.

Somehow the South African connection would not completely disappear. Shortly after Penrose contacted Dr Edward von Rothkirck, the executive editor at Trans-World News Service in Washington, the agency had suffered a series of odd incidents, including burglaries.

In the spring of 1977, Dr von Rothkirck had told the reporters how strangers had approached his news agency in 1975. The men had promised and handed him official British documents relating to the story months before it became known in Britain. It was yet another mystery connected with South Africa, the Liberal party and the Scott affair. Harold Wilson and Marcia Williams had also been mentioned to the agency.

On 22 July 1977 Dr von Rothkirck wrote to Penrose: “Sorry about the apparent screw-up in the material we sent you and the rather odd events that have taken place since we agreed to make available to you what material we had, such as our storeroom on the sixth floor of the building suffering a major burglary and then followed by an incident which led to the destruction of nearly all of the files stored there as well as certain other losses that were sustained, to finding our office burglar alarm disconnected and your not receiving the original material that was posted to you over six weeks ago.”

It was yet another bizarre incident in the story. From their enquiries the reporters had learned that the making of history is not only the preserve of important politicians, men of wealth, genius and power. A man like Norman Scott had also played a vital role.

If the far-reaching implications of the Scott affair had not spread so far over so many years Harold Wilson might still perhaps have been the British Prime Minister. Jeremy Thorpe would certainly still be the Liberal Party leader. And others would probably not have exposed themselves to the risk of being compromised or corrupted.

It was also arguable that if it had not been for the Scott affair and the possible “South African connection” the public might never have learned of the Labour Prime Minister's deep distrust of his Secret Service. His fears too about the loyalty, even treachery, of some of his Government departments, even a suspected section of the army, would probably not have emerged. So many threads had become entangled in the bizarre web.

In any event, Harold Wilson had painted a disturbing picture of his premiership in those final months of power at Number 10. Somehow the statesman whose outstanding quality for years had been strong leadership of those around him had suddenly lost control.

The Prime Minister had candidly admitted to the reporters that he had become affected by rumours and suspicions, some of them emanating from the ramifications of the Norman Scott affair.

The investigation he had asked them to undertake had come about almost by chance. It was through Lord (Albert) Murray, who ran his Political Office, that he had set up that first eventful meeting at Lord North Street eighteen months before.

In time the reporters had discovered that it had led indirectly to the timing of his resignation announcement on 16 March 1976: a date which perhaps even he did not realise was so very significant and linked to so many other notable events.

Not only had Harold Wilson been unwittingly affected by being innocently and unknowingly linked to matters involving an alleged murder conspiracy. The BBC and a section of Fleet Street had somehow also become trapped by the information which had reached them. The police, and the Home Office which stood behind them, had displayed a singular and similar lack of zeal in discovering what really lay behind the Scott affair. Some Government Ministers and civil servants and even the leader of the Conservative Party had preferred to keep their files firmly shut.

By the autumn of 1977 Harold Wilson felt particularly vulnerable about the investigation which he had unleashed eighteen months earlier. He feared it might damage the Party to which he had devoted his whole life. He was concerned too that what had emerged might upset the Government pact with the Liberals and dislodge the Administration which he supported.

Sir Harold had also felt questioning pressure from the Cabinet Office. Officials wanted to know what exactly he had told Penrose and Courtiour. Over the final weeks of 1977 the former Prime Minister began to distance himself from the journalists' investigation he had himself called into being.

In the House of Commons MPs like Peter Blaker had kept up a dogged pursuit over some of the issues which had already come to light. After putting questions in the 29 July debate in Parliament, Blaker demanded to know more about the background to Sir Harold's fears about his Secret Service.

On 7 November the Tory MP wrote to the former Prime Minister asking for specific answers about the information which he had given to Penrose and Courtiour. Ten days later he received a detailed letter which seemed to the reporters to be at variance with the relationship as they had experienced it:

#### HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

16th November 1977.

Dear Mr Blaker,

Thank you for your letter of the 8th November, to which I am replying at the earliest opportunity, having also had the opportunity of studying your speech in the House.

What happened was that Lord (Albert) Murray, then of my office, was approached by the BBC at a high level, asking me to see two young researchers of theirs about South Africa. Immediately afterwards, Sir Charles Curran, Director-General, came to see me just as he was leaving for a European Conference, asking me to give them all the help I could, as they were legitimately researching on BBC account into these matters. They were present with him and I agreed to co-operate. Later he came to me, dissociating the BBC from their inquiries, on the grounds that while on the BBC pay-roll they were insisting on their right to publish a book in their own names, embodying research undertaken in BBC time and at BBC expense. I gave them no further assistance but saw them thereafter, when they informed me that they had gone independent, and also produced a story about an intended military take-over of the British Government.

I later learnt that their book, supposedly on the "South Africa connection" had switched to sensational stories about murder plots. I refused to read the book, when the publishers offered to make it available, and I do not know what it contains.

The references to MI5 were in the context of my statement that I had no reason to believe that MI5 were at all involved in these questions. My reference to a small section of MI5 who had made oral allegations to pressmen and others about myself and other Ministers of the 1964-70 Government, was qualified by my statement that I thought they were mostly now on the retired list.

With reference to the Prime Minister's statement at the end of August, I was telephoned by *The Observer* while on holiday in the

Isles of Scilly. I confirmed that my anxieties referred to a small group, now mainly, probably wholly retired. I also asked that *The Observer* put on the record, "as a final benediction on this story", my view that any activities were by people who had gone, and to express my total agreement with the Prime Minister's statement to which you refer, thus ending the matter. Unfortunately, the reference to "benediction" and my endorsement of the Prime Minister's statement did not appear in *The Observer* and the correspondent who telephoned me expressed his regrets that this had been cut, still more that the statement had been headlined as my re-opening a question I had stated I regarded as closed.

As you will see, I have treated your letter and speech, with the same seriousness with which you approached the matter, and so that this unfortunate matter can now be laid to rest, and for this reason, given you the most detailed answer possible to your letter.

Yours sincerely,

Harold Wilson [signed]

Peter Blaker, Esq. M.P.

Despite Sir Harold's late wish it was unlikely that the "unfortunate matter" would conveniently be laid to rest. Yet the reporters could understand his bitter disappointment at the outcome of their investigation. That disappointment was reflected in a short handwritten note he sent Peter Blaker on 14 December 1977. Although Sir Harold confirmed he had been in touch with the CIA in 1976, he added, "your letter . . . raise [sic] issues, e.g. conversations with the Prime Minister . . . which would not be appropriate matters on which to comment to a back-bencher." The ex-Prime Minister was now emphasising the traditional reticence of his former office. Perhaps Sir Harold was now judging the new situation from his own experience in recent weeks.

Sir Harold had turned formidable guns on his enemies in March 1976 and found he had placed his own friends in the firing line. Ironically the very manner he had chosen to defend them might well turn out to be their ultimate undoing.

Initially Mr Callaghan had come to his assistance. Speaking about Sir Harold's South African allegations, he told Parliament on 20 May 1976 that those who had known the former Prime Minister for many years "will know that he has a great capacity for illuminating the truth long before it becomes apparent to other people".

In the South African affair there was little sign that Harold Wilson could be proved wholly right. Courtiour and Penrose had certainly failed to substantiate his allegations in the convincing way he had wanted. Foreign interference from Pretoria had hardly been on the precise and massive scale which he had spoken about so confidently in Parliament two years before.

Sir Harold's role in the story was an irony which South Africans like General Van den Bergh of BOSS would undoubtedly relish and exploit. The scandals which the ex-Prime Minister had wanted to expose had largely backfired and their effects would reverberate inside British politics for some time to come.

Harold Wilson was no stranger to political scandals. As Opposition leader he had seen the Profumo affair place Harold Macmillan at risk and eventually serve as a "benediction" for an era. And there were definite parallels between the Profumo and South African affairs.

In the celebrated Profumo debate on 17 June 1963 Harold Wilson had spoken about "disclosures which have shocked the moral conscience of the nation".

He told the Commons then how he has passed confidential information to the Tory Prime Minister but the latter had failed to act.

"Rightly or wrongly we did everything in our power to prevent this becoming a matter of public discussion or a matter for party controversy," he had told MPs. But Macmillan's attitude had been he said: "What has this to do with me?"

Fourteen years later Harold Wilson might also be accused of indolent nonchalance", the phrase he had used against Macmillan. For like many others in 1977 he too now preferred the scandal to remain strictly private.

Yet there had been interference with the applications of the law, conspiracy, the hint of treason and allegations of an attempted murder. But Sir Harold's enthusiasm for the enquiry which had helped expose such vices had subsided as quickly as it had risen. In public he had shown no signs yet of an outraged moral conscience. After breaking ranks with the establishment in May 1976 he had re-joined it with quiet apprehension.

The reporters remembered Neil Butterfield's words in 1975. In another context the barrister had spoken of an establishment cover-up: "Every door has been slammed and all the hatches have been battened down as the establishment, not surprisingly, retreats into close formation to face the threat offered to it."



## POSTSCRIPT

Meanwhile as their typescript went to the printers on Monday 12 December 1977, Penrose and Courtiour were booked on the same flight as two British police officers travelling to California to interview Peter Bessell.

Because the former MP lived permanently outside United Kingdom jurisdiction, the Avon and Somerset Constabulary had been uncertain what his attitude might be and they had asked the reporters to act as an informal link. But Bessell had assured Courtiour he would cooperate with the police after first establishing his legal rights as a British subject living in the United States.

On Tuesday afternoon, 13 December, the reporters introduced Bessell to Detective Chief Superintendent Michael Challes and Detective Superintendent David Greenough, and joined them at their first meeting with the former MP's lawyers. It was the first contact there had been between the police and Bessell since the Scott shooting incident more than two years before.

Bessell's Beverly Hills attorneys, Allen Susman and Steven Fayne, said their client was willing to cooperate but they did want certain assurances. For one thing they wanted an assurance that any cooperation would not "land their client in trouble in Britain or elsewhere".

Peter Bessell also wanted an assurance that the British police were investigating the affair seriously and were not part of any "cover-up" as he suspected they might be.

Detective Chief Superintendent Challes, who had been involved in the original investigation after the Scott shooting incident in October 1975, said he knew of no cover-up and was investigating the affair vigorously. The police, he said, no longer regarded the case as simply involving a shot dog. As far as they were concerned, they were now investigating an alleged murder conspiracy involving several people.

The detectives believed the ex-MP could help them in two main areas: the background leading up to the shooting incident in October 1975, and subsequent developments, including details of the conversations he had had with David Holmes in Oceanside in January 1976.

In meetings throughout that December week, all of which Penrose and Courtiour attended, Bessell provided the police with

information he read out from his 102-page, 60,000 word *aide-mémoire*. He had first shown it to the reporters fourteen months before and it had proved to be a remarkable and invaluable document.

Since their earlier visit to Oceanside in 1976, Bessell had moved to a nearby complex of four bungalows owned by his wife-to-be Diane Kelly. The bungalows overlooked the Pacific Ocean and were individually named Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Cornwall.

The meetings mostly took place in the living-room of the first bungalow, Devon, behind its drawn white curtains and with the Pacific breakers thundering on the sandy beach a few yards away.

Sipping endless cups of tea and smoking heavily, Bessell read from his *aide-mémoire* while the detectives made copious notes. Although, as the hours went by, they made few comments, both Mr Challes and his colleague appeared startled as they heard the roll-call of names which Bessell said had been involved in a political cover-up of classic proportions.

What the former Prime Minister had called in his letter to Tory MP Peter Blaker "this unfortunate matter" would not go away. Peter Bessell and others were now making certain the story would not be "laid to rest" yet.

For the time being the file would remain open. . . .

*London, 21 December 1977*

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